

Twist

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Twist

by [CrackingLamb](#)

Summary

Carly Mayers has landed in Thedas after an experiment gone wrong. She has no idea how it happened, and no way home. She's stuck in a Lavellan body, the Anchor in one hand and a bow in the other, and has to survive all the events of the game for real. Hopefully without giving away her secret to everyone she meets.

But she knows none of that matters. She knows what's *really coming for Thedas after the game is over*.

Can she possibly change his mind and save the world, along with everyone in it - including him?

Beta'd by Iron_Angel.

*NSFW chapters are marked with **.*

Notes

Hi! Please check your expectations for canon here. The main quests and timeline will still go according to schedule...more or less. Everything else is scrambled eggs.

Prepare for headcannons galore, an Inky who knows more lore than is good for her (and has had too much time to think about it, much like the author) and a soft Elvhen rebel who just needs a hug and maybe a snack. Posting date will head each chapter.

This doesn't take itself too seriously, although there's plenty of angst to be had. I reply to every comment, feedback is the lifeblood. Enjoy, cheers!

3/3/20

This Isn't Right

The headset settled comfortably on Carly Mayer's head and she leaned back into the chair, squirming around to get a feel for where it supported and where it didn't. She shifted some more and found the sweet spot and sighed happily.

"Are you ready?"

"Yup."

Immersive Virtual Reality. It would be an interesting test run. At least she'd played the game enough times to know what she was doing in it without too much trouble in case the whole thing got glitchy. The fact that she was a total lore hound had no bearing on the test, other than to make her gameplay more thorough.

"Start up sequence initiated," another voice said and she closed her eyes, knowing the first few seconds would be disorienting. "You already got your character ready, right?"

"Yeah," Carly said. Her usual. Dalish, archer. Aiming for Cullen if the Egg didn't sweep her off her feet like he always did, no matter how many times it broke her heart..

Stop, concentrate on the game. That's the test. Stop thinking about the romance options.

"I'm ready."

There was a small, high pitched popping noise in her ear and before she could ask what it was, a bright green flash filled what little space there was between her eyes and the headset. Then she felt like she was falling. She couldn't hear the others anymore, couldn't feel the comfy chair under her. She fell forever, it felt like. And not like the other test they'd done, the visual one where she'd done a bunch of obstacle courses in the VR suite. That had just been a handheld and not this get up with a chair and all the electrodes and...

She fell forward on her hands and knees, her wrists bound in manacles and brown hair falling into her face when she opened her eyes.

Damn, the immersion is way better.

She looked around the cell, ready and waiting for Cassandra to come bursting in with her temper and her sword and Leliana on her heels begging her to relax. She took a deep breath and centered herself, looked at the mark like she knew she should. It was pulsing in her palm, she could really feel it. Looking around again, she saw she couldn't find the edges of the VR. They'd finally gotten the 360 wrap around finished. Sweet. It was like really being in the game. Man, this was going to make gameplay so much better. Like free cam without the clipping problem.

The door banged open on schedule and she listened to Cass's spouting without reacting. In fact, she had to stop herself from mouthing the words along with the Seeker. Leliana was watching her, and she remembered very quickly that the Nightingale was also the Spymaster. She couldn't give away...

Wait...why was Leliana looking at her like that? That didn't happen in game. And how did she even have the urge to speak Cass's lines along with her, like she could actually do it if she wanted to? Something wasn't...right.

She made her responses, had the manacles off and the ropes on, got hauled to her feet and dragged into the sunlight. It didn't hurt her eyes like it should, but she flinched anyway, because that's what the characters always did in the intro. The air was crisp and cold, with that back of the sinuses feeling that said *snow*. The Breach flared and so did her hand, interrupting Cassandra's cold explanation of what had happened. She wasn't paying attention. Her stomach growled and her feet tingled from being sat on and she had to pee.

What?

"I need to pee?" she said aloud. Cassandra looked over her shoulder at her, startled. Wait just a damn minute. First off, she shouldn't have been able to say anything that wasn't a coded bit of dialogue. Second, and perhaps more importantly, she shouldn't have to have real life urges inside the VR. What the hell was going on?

"Can it wait?" Cass said, impatient.

"Um..."

"Ugh." At least that was in character. The Seeker pointed off to the side of the road where a familiar styled small shack stood by itself. "Make it quick."

She stepped inside and looked at the actually rather clean and well kept outhouse. She did her business – a little challenging given her hands were still tied together and zippers were not a thing in Thedas – and looked at her hands again. She should have a quick exit patch on her hand next to her mark. She pressed her palm, but nothing happened.

Well, not nothing. Just not an exit. What happened was it hurt like a burn splitting open and she gasped in shock.

She pressed it again and again did not exit the game. Panic started deep in her chest, welling up and consuming. Something was *wrong*. She poked the walls of the outhouse, found a splinter and felt its sharp point against her finger. No, she wasn't in the game. She was *in* Thedas. This was happening in real time. She was stuck inside the game, *for real*.

"*Shit*. Shit shit shit shit..."

"Are you finished?" Cass called from outside, impatience clear in her voice. "We need to get moving."

"Yeah, I'll be...right there." She struggled to put herself to rights and stepped back out into the sunlight, a few lazy flurries floating around her head. The Seeker had her back to her, tension in every line of her posture. Fuck. If this was for real, she could get hurt. She could *die*. "Um, you think I could get a weapon or something. There's demons up ahead."

Cassandra whipped around and stared at her. "How do you know that?"

Because that's the coded first fight of the game. On the river ice. Grotesqueries growing out of the ground. "You said stuff came out of the Breach, right? That means stuff's gonna be between us and the forward camp."

The Seeker's eyes narrowed. This was totally off script now. How the hell was she going to survive this? She'd never fought a day of her life. Game mechanics were one thing, this was...

This was going to be *real*. She was terrified.

“Stuff?” Cassandra repeated, her face quizzical.

Shit. She was going to die. She'd given away more than she should know and Cass was just going to spit her on that greatsword before they even reached the Rift she was supposed to close with the mark she wasn't supposed to know how she had. *Thanks for that, Solas.*

Wait...Solas. The one and only Fen'Harel, mage god.

Carly stared at the Seeker, trying to get into character. The next few minutes were critical. She still had to prove herself worth keeping around. She had to make it as far as meeting Solas. She had to pretend she didn't know what she was walking into.

“You said we needed to get moving right?” she pointed out, hoping that it would trigger the game back to where it was supposed to be. *It's not a game, Carly. It's happening.*

Shut up brain, I don't need the reminder right now.

“Yes.” The Seeker kept looking at her strangely as they went down the road, past more people than should have been there. Survivors from the explosion. Their angry faces were harder to meet than when she was just playing. “They have decided you're guilty.”

“I know.”

“What?”

“Let's...just get this over with. I can't prove to you I didn't do this until...”

Cassandra sighed. “They are angry and confused. They mourn our Most Holy.” Carly nodded, knowing already what the Seeker was going to say. But she let her ramble. It was like the cut scene, right? She shouldn't be able to change any of it. She waited until Cass cut the rope binding her wrists, knowing she was supposed to ask where they were going. She didn't.

“Your mark must be tested on one of the smaller rifts,” Cassandra continued, leading the way across the battlements where they let out onto the road to the valley. Carly followed, knowing this was going to be more than just a trial. She flinched before the bridge exploded, but the Seeker didn't see it and she rolled down the broken stones and landed on the ice with a grunt just like it was scripted. It stung more than it hurt and she got to her feet pretty quick, eyes scanning the all too real mounds of convenient supplies that fell with them. She knew her first weapon should be in one of them.

Cassandra ran ahead, like she was supposed to, and took on the first demon that had popped up from the ice. Carly knew the next one was going to burst through right in front of her and looked around, frantic. There, the bow leaning on a box. She grabbed it, feeling its weight in her hands. She didn't know how to do this. But she had to try. She slung the quiver over her shoulder and held the bow. She wouldn't say it was comfortable in her hands, but it wasn't uncomfortable either. She drew, already knowing where the weak spots were in the demon, hoping they were the same in real life. To her complete surprise, she killed it in three shots.

Cassandra had taken care of the other one and Carly pulled the arrows from the rapidly melting corpse before they melted too. If this was real, she couldn't waste them. Shit. She watched, revolted and fascinated, as the demon melted into the ice. It wasn't like the game at all, where the bodies sort of dissipated into pixels and clipped into the ground. No, this was visceral and gross and stank like sulfur and blood. She nearly gagged.

“Let's go.”

She looked at Cassandra and nodded, not even bothering to say the line she knew was coded into the scene. Because it wasn't a scene. It was happening, and she was already tired and starving and more terrified than she'd ever been in her life. She had no idea how it happened, and even less idea of how she was going to get out of it. There was nothing else she could do but move forward, hope to remember to always aim for the head end and survive.

Solas will hopefully know what to do. Fade magic is all hand wavey to make the game mechanics work right. It shouldn't be that different for real...right? It's gotta obey the laws of physics here, but those are already different from the real world. My world.

Okay, that was the plan. Survive long enough to make it to Haven. Talk to him and tell him everything. He was likely the only one who wouldn't look at her like she was insane. She snorted to herself as she and Cassandra made their slow, fighting way to the valley and the forward camp. Who was she kidding? He was still going to look at her like she was insane. But he'd also probably believe her. After all, she knew who he was, she could give him all sorts of details. And if he was really real, like she feared everything here was, that meant he really *was* an ancient elven god-mage. And he was her only hope of getting out of this shit alive.

All This Shit Is Weird

Chapter Notes

3/10/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“It seems you hold the key to our salvation.”

Carly didn't even have the breath to spare for something snarky. She bent over with her hands on her knees, heaving for air and just nodded. At this point, she wasn't even hungry anymore. Just exhausted and her hand felt like someone had hit her in the funny bone. Solas was looking at her expectantly and she remembered that she was actually supposed to say something here. Or, well...in the game she would have said something. Ugh, this was annoying. She didn't know how much events would run the same or whether she had any influence over them. And at the same time, all she could think of to reply was 'yeah, I know I do'.

That wouldn't help matters.

“Wonderful,” she gasped out, trying to remember exactly what the dialogue wheel had on it. “At least it's good for something before it kills me. Well...maims me.” *Shit, too much.*

He was looking at her more closely now, shrewdness in his eyes that didn't match the apostate hobo look at all. Well, at least he wasn't standing there in that fake humble posture he did in the game anymore. She hated that look on him.

Thankfully, Varric still broke the tension as he was supposed to. *Maker, bless the dwarf*, she thought. He introduced himself and she made the appropriate remarks about Bianca. His eyes twinkled and he faced off with Cassandra just as he should with a wink. Carly wasn't in the mood to play out the whole scene, however, and interrupted them before Cass could go off on how she didn't want him there.

“We need him. That crossbow is more powerful than anything any of us can wield.” She turned to the Seeker. “Does it look like you're in a position to spurn any resources?”

Cassandra frowned at her, and Solas made a noise remarkably like a snort. Varric chuckled. “Nice to be appreciated from the start by *someone*.”

The Seeker huffed and wandered off, leaving the three of them alone. And there was the grin on Solas's face, that whole 'we're all friends here, right' shtick. She was much too tired to play along and just looked at him, trying to see how much of it bled through in the beginning. Not much. The cover was good. Well, that was the point, wasn't it?

“My name is Solas,” he said, “if there are to be introductions. I am pleased to see you still live.”

No shit, you need me, she thought automatically. He jumped and she couldn't shake the feeling that he heard it somehow. When she met his eyes, he turned thoughtful, a slight frown creasing his forehead. All it did was draw her attention to his tiny scar.

“He means he kept that mark from killing you while you slept,” Varric interjected on cue.

“How long did I sleep anyway? It's all a jumble.”

“Several days.” Solas knew, she'd stake her life on it. He knew she wasn't what she seemed, but he seemed willing to play along, just as he was doing anyway. Especially considering she *hadn't* been asleep for days, she just got there. Right? She sighed internally; it really was all a jumble. But him guessing was fine, it would make the inevitable conversation easier.

“I'm Carly.”

“That is not a Dalish name,” Solas said softly. Yup, he knew.

“Would you prefer something more mellifluous with hidden layers of meaning? Solas?” *Pride. Yeah, I know that's what it means. That's not all I know.* He was startled again, and something moved in his eyes now. Something more than mere suspicion. *Aha, there he is.* She took the sting of her rejoinder out with a small smile, almost apologetic. Almost. Because in some inexplicable way, he *was* reading her mind and that was going to make all of this more complicated. His eyes narrowed but he nodded in acknowledgment, both of her words and her thoughts. “Right, we need to get this show on the road, I guess. There's a lot to do before we get settled. I mean...I would imagine.”

“Yes, there is,” Solas said. Then he turned his back and followed Cassandra.

“You're not from around here, are you, *Carly*?” Varric asked before they joined the others.

“Um....”

“That's a no,” he said with a laugh. “Good to know.”

“Is it?”

“Isn't it?” She reminded herself that he was a gifted storyteller, more observant than most and that Solas might not be the only one she needed to clarify things to. Hell, she might as well start now and get it over with.

“It's a long story, Varric. And to be honest, I don't actually know parts of it.” He looked interested in the prospect of figuring it out. He didn't seem upset or bothered and she wondered how far she could push it. “How's Hawke?”

That got her a raised eyebrow combined with a failed attempt at an innocent look.

She smiled, conspiratorially. “Don't worry, I won't tell Cass. And when Hawke gets here, I'll have your back for protecting her. Her? Him? Which sibling made it to Kirkwall?”

“Her. How did you know that? And, uh...Bethany. Carver died in Ferelden.”

Okay, that narrowed it down. Carver was gone, so Bethany was alive. Well, she'd made it to Kirkwall, at least. Bethany meant either rogue or fighter Hawke. She did some quick mental calculations and looked back at him to see his face set in hard planes. She was strongly reminded that Varric had a ruthless protective streak in him. “Look, I know who Hawke is, okay? I know what she did in Kirkwall. I just...” she waved her hands around, eloquently confounded. “Not from around here, remember? The details are...fuzzy.”

“Right,” he drawled, downright sarcastic. And skeptical.

She looked around, seeing how far the others were away. “Sided with the mages?” He nodded

cautiously. "Did she let Anders live or stab him in the back? Where's Bethany now?"

"How...?"

"Look at it this way. I know more than I should, but not enough of this world state. Does that make sense?"

"No, it doesn't. Where are you from, Carly?" He was too canny to look truly astonished, but it was there just the same lurking at the edges, sneaking past the skepticism.

She shook her head, a small snort escaping her. "You'd never believe me."

"Try me."

She knelt down, getting closer to him to whisper, hoping what she was about to say wasn't going to land her back in the jail with more than just manacles keeping her in place. "I'm from a world where this is all a game. Like, an actual game, where I would normally make choices to determine the outcome. In that world, I've already played the part where you and Hawke meet and everything that happens in Kirkwall. I know about the red lyrium. I know about the Deep Roads, and the Arishok and Anders' betrayal. I know you lied your ass off to hide Hawke from our fair Seeker. And I don't blame you a bit. She's been through enough."

"I..." His face went through several expressions in rapid succession and then he came to a decision. "Bethany is a Warden. Anders is...missing. She let him go. She's in Rivain."

"With Bela and Fenris?"

"Uh...yeah...actually. How...never mind. I think I'm just going to go with all this shit is weird and keep moving."

"Same, my friend. Same."

"Are we? Friends, I mean."

"In all my playthroughs, you are my best friend, Varric Tethras." She stood up again and brushed the snow off her knees.

"I only understood about half of that statement, but it sounded positive. How did you even get here?"

"I have no idea. It wasn't supposed to happen."

"It was not supposed to happen this way," Solas said, the orb shattered at his feet.

Wait...

She knew what was going to happen. She already knew every move Corypheus was going to make. She knew what 'missions' should take higher priority, what things she should focus on. She could *change* things. Everything she'd read about Solas's arc said that a romanced Lavellan was a breath away from making him change his mind. If she wanted to save this world from him, she would just have to do one better, wouldn't she?

Sorry Cullen, I need to gain enough of the Egg's trust to fix the upcoming shitstorm.

Varric was watching her still, his arms crossed and face speculative. He seemed to realize she was thinking ahead, planning out how to play this. "Is it like some time magic bullshit?"

“Eh...close enough.”

“It's not good to meddle with time, they say.”

“Varric.” She regarded him very seriously. “If I don't, the world will end.”

“That sounds...shit, you're serious.”

“Trust me. Meddling with events is the only way to get out of this alive.” She couldn't tell him what she knew, not yet. She couldn't tell Varric that Solas was the enemy they were actually hunting for. There was meddling and then there was *breaking*. She sighed. “Listen, I can't tell you everything. Too much foreknowledge could just make it harder to pull off. Can you trust me?”

“For now. You'll need someone in your corner, I think. You say you...what was it?...have my back? I'll have yours.”

She stuck out her hand and he shook it. “Good enough for me.”

“Right, we've dawdled long enough. Time to catch up. Follow my lead, since you don't seem to know how to fight, even though you knew exactly where they would be.”

“That obvious?”

“To me anyway. I won't tell.”

“I appreciate that.” They started walking to where Cassandra and Solas were pointedly not looking at each other while they waited. Both of them were visibly impatient to boot. Carly giggled and heard Varric chuckle beside her. “This is going to be interesting, isn't it?”

“Yeah, that's one word for it. Well, Bianca's excited at least.”

She smiled more broadly, feeling more like she was back on even keel as he said the words she knew he should. “Thanks, Varric.”

“For what?”

“For being you.”

Chapter End Notes

Dwarf BFF for the win. Always.

Yanking the Wolf's Tail

Chapter Notes

3/17/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A montage cut scene and half an hour of gameplay was in all actuality over a week of work settling into Haven. First of all – and shocking to her, although she told herself it shouldn't have been – it wasn't a village. It was a walled town with nothing where she expected it to be. In some respects, however, that made it easier to deal with.

Like the Chantry being prominent on the main street, overlooking everything else. She'd been granted a cubbyhole of a room for her own use, which she tried to accept gracefully. Frankly, dealing with the Chantry as a whole was not her idea of a good time. She wasn't fond of fanaticism under the best of circumstances, which these plainly were not. Still, she had gotten a fair amount of salty glee in watching Cassandra invoke the Inquisition to the consternation of the Lord Chancellor. That almost made up for constantly being looked at sideways by everyone outside of a chosen few.

She'd spent a fair amount of the rest of her time getting used to this unfamiliar town and the people she would be relying upon in the future. She'd visited the training ground where Cullen maintained a tight rein on the slowly growing Inquisition forces. The camp ran along the walls, and even took up the vast majority of Haven's underground cellars for barracks. News traveled fast, as well. She'd already received Krem's invitation, and was making plans to go out and meet Bull and the rest of the Chargers. She wondered if he really was that disproportionate in real life. She talked with Cassandra and Leliana, and of course, Josephine worked tirelessly from the background as her Ambassador.

In the meantime before setting off for the Storm Coast, Varric had set up a target for her to practice her shooting on. Since she hadn't told him not to, he set it up behind the apothecary's shop where it was relatively well hidden between the cottage and the walls. There was no sense letting the entire Inquisition know she had shot a bow for the first time the day she 'woke'. Especially when she was having this kind of day, where half her shots went off into the trees. She just couldn't seem to dial in her aim.

Trudging back to her shooting spot with a handful of arrows and a headful of pine needles, she saw Solas leaning against the corner of the cottage, his face a smooth mask of mildness. “Come to watch?”

“Does it bother you?”

“No,” she lied. She turned her back on him and drew the bow, desperately trying to ignore his eyes on her. She let fly and the arrow sort of slid sideways along the edge of the target, sticking for the merest second before drooping to hang like a soggy feather. “Dammit.”

She pulled again and let fly, and the bowstring *thwapped* along her arm with a sharp sting. That had been happening a lot, and she didn't know how to stop it. Already her arm was killing her. The arrow wobbled its way to the target, but at least it stuck. She waited for him to comment, but he

said nothing. Again and again she drew, until her shoulders were burning and she was biting back yelps every time the string hit her. She had one final arrow in this round and she sagged to try and stretch out her sore muscles. She was tired and in pain and having his eyes on her while she did this was entirely too distracting.

“You are not from this world, are you?” he asked as she straightened up and drew. She released the string and the arrow sailed true. Right over the top of the target.

“Dammit,” she swore again. She looked over her shoulder at him and scowled. “Gee, what gave it away?”

He looked amused. “No Dalish archer of your age should shoot so terribly.”

“I didn't think you'd spent a lot of time with the Dalish, Solas,” she said, only slightly acerbic.

“I have spent enough to know that you are not one of them,” he retorted without heat. He went to the target himself and pulled her arrows, bringing them back to her. Even the ones that had gone into the trees, which he seemed to just summon to him. It was a strange gesture of contrition for breaking her concentration, but she got the sense that it was his intent. “May I?”

She blinked at him and nodded. He had her hold up the bow and measured the length of her arm against it. His fingers were cool against hers as he shifted her grip on the wood. He handed her an arrow and she nocked and drew it, but he stopped her before she released it.

“Cant your arm and bend your elbow just a bit. Now draw the string to your ear.” It was a fairly monumental effort when she was already tired, but she did as he directed. The arrow sank shaft deep into the target, just off to the side of the center. He gave a satisfied smile. “You have promise.”

She had forgotten. Forgotten that he wasn't just a friend to Mythal, but a *soldier of Mythal*. He'd fought for her, led troops for her. He had been advisor and general and an archer himself in the distant past before assuming this facade as a mere apostate. She wondered if he even recognized how easily he'd slipped into the role of mentor just now. *He wants to give wisdom, not orders.*

“I know that you're Fen'Harel,” she blurted. His posture immediately went stiff as a board and he stepped away from her, infusing the distance with an abrupt coldness she didn't know could be felt that fast.

“How do you have that knowledge?” he asked, very softly, almost menacingly.

“Not from this world, remember?”

“That does not explain *how*.”

She gave him a smirk. “I see you're not denying it. The Dalish god of trickery and deception, but no one ever said you were actually a liar. You have a malicious compliance kind of relationship with the truth, don't you? You always speak it, the absolute barest minimum of it, even if the idiots around you never know that because you twist the emphasis to be inferred as something else. Am I close?”

His eyes narrowed at her, and frown lines appeared between them. Oh, she knew she was treading a fine line, but so was he. He needed her if he wanted his Anchor back. The whole thing could end right now if she told anyone. But she didn't actually want to do that. It wasn't just the fact that Corypheus still needed to be dealt with, and having a powerful mage at her side would help. No, she harbored a desire to save Solas from himself.

Too many heartbreaking playthroughs, Carly, she thought. He gave her a curious glance then. Right, he could read her mind. "Is it magic that lets you do that?"

"Do what, precisely?"

"Get into my head."

"Was it magic that brought you here from...wherever you are from?"

She shrugged, not particularly surprised that he deflected her question. "I have no idea. Varric thinks it's like time magic, and that's close enough, I suppose."

"The dwarf is aware of your...otherworldly status?"

"Yeah, he could tell I couldn't shoot for shit too. That's why I'm practicing."

"I believe it would be more accurate to say 'dimension magic'."

"Probably." She laid down the bow and stretched her neck and shoulders. She scrubbed the pine needles from her hair and then stretched her arms. Her sleeves fell back and she saw the angry purpling welt from the bowstring. She covered it with her hand, but he'd already seen it. He held out his own, with an air of impatience somewhat at odds with his chilly demeanor. She gave him her arm.

"Keep your elbow bent slightly when you shoot and it will not do this," he murmured, passing a wave of healing magic over the mottled bruises. Goosebumps rose in its wake and she just nodded, struck rather dumb. It was bewitching to be healed in such a seamless, painless way. He kept her arm in his grip and looked at her hand, pulling her fingers open and examining his own handiwork on the Anchor. "Does it give you trouble?"

"It stings like a bitch when I use it," she said and laughed at his expression. "And to answer your question of *how*, where I'm from, this is all a game, a work of fiction. One that I've played to the end many times. I know all your secrets."

He raised an eyebrow but didn't take her bait. "Then perhaps it was not entirely unfortunate that you ended up with this mark."

"Anchor," she emphasized. "Go ahead, call it by its name, I know what it is. And I agree." She slipped her hand loose from his before it got too weirdly comfortable there. "Corypheus is out there somewhere with an orb he can't break into since he doesn't have the key. That would just end poorly for everyone."

"How do you know that?"

"Solas, I know everything that's going to happen. I even know what order it will happen in. In my world...it was just a game, a way to pass the time." She looked around, up into the mountains, around what she could see of the town from their position. "Now it's real."

"Everything?" he asked, archly.

She glanced at him and smiled to herself. Ahh, there it was, the lurking wolf in the shadows. "Yes, Solas, everything. I know every move Corypheus will make, and I know exactly what you're planning. Using the Inquisition for your own ends. Smart. Doesn't mean I like it, because I don't, but it's smart."

He bristled but it was subtle, cleverly muted by his customary polite mask. *You never let anyone see behind it*, she thought, unconcerned if he heard it or not.

“Don't worry,” she continued aloud. “I don't plan to say anything. I figure you're my best shot to get home. Call it an accident of science or just plain magic that brought me here, if you like. You, immortal Elvhen mage, have the power to rewrite reality, or at least, you will.” She shrugged again, ignoring the feeling in her gut that told her she didn't want to say it. Which was weird; of course she wanted to get home. Right? “You should be enough to get me where I need to be.”

“Why would I help you?”

“Well, at the moment, *you need me*, so I'd say it'd be an even trade for services rendered.” She wiggled her fingers at him, as if he could forget that she held his ticket to the Fade. She looked away from him again, let him stew in it for a while. This would be the tricky part. She couldn't force him to agree, and it was made trickier by the fact that apparently he could read her mind. He would know if she was pulling a fast one on him. He could learn more than he should know about things. Too many things.

“There are considerations I must make,” he said, then he walked away without waiting for her to reply.

Well, it was a start.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! *waves* So...yeah, as someone who's done archery for 20+ years, the advice Solas gives her about her hyperextended elbows is completely valid and good, and is what I was taught when I was still taking lessons. Even wearing a guard doesn't help if the arm bends back too far. At this point I can't even remember which lore video I got the headcannon about him being an archer came from, but the implication that he was a general and advisor to Mythal before his rebellion is easy to read between the lines, especially listening to his banter with Sera and his opinions of Inky's decisions.

Let me know what you think, feedback is the lifeblood.

Honest Answers to Loaded Questions

Chapter Notes

3/24/20

The fire crackled merrily between them as Carly watched Solas make notations in a journal before the light faded completely. Snow was swirling around them lazily and she shivered. Early winter in the Hinterlands was far more romantic on the other side of a screen. And that still wasn't saying much. She looked around their small camp and noticed that Iron Bull and Varric's bickering had died down as they each went about whatever evening business was at hand now that they'd all eaten dinner. She tossed another piece of wood on the fire, throwing up a curtain of sparks that made Solas jump.

"Sorry," she said. He closed and packed away his journal and gave her a mild look across the fire.

"I am losing the light anyway."

He looked strange wearing a hood, not to mention more layers than she'd ever seen on him outside of armor, but even he'd made a concession to the weather. She had to imagine a bald head in the wind was unpleasant at best. However, it made her think too much of other Elvhen she would meet later on, their features well schooled and well hidden in the depths of shadows. He had never looked more like one of them, even though she was fully aware that he was not. There was a certain dichotomy about him. Sure, she couldn't complain about his handiwork with his staff, and watching him in action had been fairly breathtaking. But he was still a stranger to her, for all that she knew many of his innermost secrets.

She glanced over her shoulder again and saw that Bull was sitting in the dark, looking out across the wilderness as if he was keeping watch. He probably was. Varric had already disappeared into the tent the men would be sharing. Which was amusing to her, if to no one else. *City slicker*. She was glad she'd brought Bull along, even with his good-natured sniping with Solas. He proved to be every bit as much fun as she thought he would – not to mention, yes, he really was that disproportionate – and his Chargers were a welcome addition to the Inquisition.

But it was hard to keep up a facade around him and so she kept her distance. Kept things professional. She felt like she was cheating herself from a friendship that could be much more rewarding because of it. Varric helped, and she was grateful for his distractions that drew Bull's attention away from her sometimes out of place reactions to things.

Like this current hunt. In the morning they would arrive at the ruins and the first of the artifacts that would supposedly strengthen the Veil. And she'd led them right to it, no pussyfooting around with a map. Mostly she wanted to get it over with. She knew there were a ton of other things to focus on afterwards. Plus, she had a trip to Val Royeaux to plan. Vivienne's invitation had finally arrived.

Since that it was quiet and just the two of them, she wondered if she could get a straight answer from her often obfuscating companion and looked back to him. "Solas, if I asked you something, would you answer truthfully?"

“That inquiry seems designed to be a trap,” he answered, a wry expression on his face lit up by the flames.

“Okay, that's fair, I guess.”

“Ask.”

“These artifacts, they're supposed to strengthen the Veil, right?” She waited for him to nod and held onto his gaze. “Do they?”

Or will they simply make it weaker, make it easier for you in the long run, she thought in her head.

His eyes sharpened on her before passing over her shoulder to where Bull sat. He came around the fire to sit next to her on the ground, his long legs folded up gracefully under him in a half lotus position. With her seated on an overturned log, they were nearly eye to eye. He lowered his voice so it didn't carry.

“Are you really a creature from another world or are you a spirit made flesh?” he asked in turn, deflecting smoothly. She smirked at him.

“As the resident expert on the Fade, not to mention you can apparently read my mind, don't you think you should know the answer to that already?”

“A valid point.” He looked away for a moment and she got the sense he was mulling over his words carefully. “Do you have reason to think I would lie about such a thing?”

“Duh. Trickster.” She grinned to take the sting from it, but he still gave her a fairly reproving look.

“What was it you said I had? 'Malicious compliance' with the truth?”

“I seem to recall you didn't actually confirm that,” she retorted. He tilted his head to the side and gave her a small smile. Like he was proud of her observation. Which did weird things to her insides she did *not* want to examine.

“I suppose that is true. In any event, yes, they will strengthen the Veil. Too many disruptions to the current state of it will only result in more and bigger rifts. There is no use expending the power of the Anchor repairing small portions over and over. It would be better to have it whole for the time being. It was already weak enough without this disturbance.”

“Okay.”

“Why do you ask?”

“Call it a fan theory.” He raised an eyebrow at her, tacitly asking her to explain, and she grinned again. “All right, let's see if I can make this make sense. On my side of...*things*, there aren't a lot of answers when it comes to you. You disappear from the narrative a bit. No one knows how much you had planned ahead of time, or how you would accomplish your end goal. There were a lot of theories made up by people who'd played the game, guesses as to your next move. Some people thought that maybe you had me...the Inquisition, that is, activate the artifacts as a way to pave your way, so to speak, later on.”

“And yet, you claim to know what my goal is,” he prodded.

“Well, yeah, you kinda outright say it in the end. But that was later, and only to the player, and you don't explain *how*. No one else knows. Well...not no one, speaking of spirits. Ugh, it's

complicated.” She shook her head sharply, and made sure to keep her voice low. “I know you want to bring the whole thing down, is what I’m saying. And I was just wondering if this is part of that, or if you want it to be stable for now, until all the pieces are in place.”

He looked away from her, and poked the fire with a stick. If the tension hadn’t been so thick, she would have laughed. He was like a child sometimes, finding gleeful amusement in the simplest things, but always a cloud seemed to hang over him. One of his own making, she presumed. She knew he felt guilt over his actions in the past, guilt that carried into his present as he woke to a world sundered from everything that had made it what it was before. And yet, here he was, finding enjoyment in mundane things while they had this odd conversation. And he thought *she* was an enigma.

“It becomes a matter of timing, does it not?” he asked into the silence.

“I guess.”

“Do you play chess?”

“I’ve been known to dabble. I at least know how all the pieces move. We’re all pawns to you right now, aren’t we?”

“I would not say that.”

She leaned over to him a little, giving herself an excuse to bump his shoulder with hers. “You didn’t have to, harellen, I just did.”

He startled a bit, a fleeting expression on his face that made her think she’d called him out successfully and she smiled warmly. She’d made sure to whisper even lower so Bull wouldn’t hear her call him by such a leading term.

“Some of you are not pawns,” he finally replied, fairly unwillingly if the long sigh afterwards meant anything.

“Hmm,” she hummed. “I think that’s a good thing. That being said, don’t think I don’t know how *you* play. You’ll sacrifice everything to make sure you win.”

He turned his head to her and the calm look in his eye was mesmerizing in its simplicity. “And you would not?”

“That would depend entirely on what I was aiming to win, I guess.” She could easily get lost in that look, she realized, and forcibly turned her attention to the dying fire. She took the stick from his hand and stirred up the coals, adding a new log onto the top to nestle in and catch. The flames leapt high for a moment, casting harsh shadows on them both, before settling down to a slower, steadier burn.

“What are you aiming to win?” he asked, so softly she nearly missed it.

“Peaceful coexistence,” she said without hesitation. He turned his head but didn’t look directly at her. She thought she might have thrown him a bit, having a ready answer.

“For whom?”

“For everyone. Elves, humans, dwarves, spirits...assorted others. I want this world to be whole. Enough has happened to it.”

“You include spirits in your aims?”

“Of course, they're part of this world. Intrinsic,” she drawled out. “C'mon, you'd ask that after wondering out loud if I'm one of them?” She made a scoffing noise. “Something to remember about me, Solas. I don't have the preconceived notions that most Thedosians have about the Fade. The preconceived notions that *you* have about what I should be. You should probably check those at the door. Wait...does that even make sense to you? Is coat checking a thing?”

She got a laugh out of him at that, a rasping one that ended with a snort. It was entirely too endearing and her heart squeezed. “Yes, there is something similar to what I think you mean, certainly in higher echelons of society. I shall bear that in mind.”

“You do that.”

He stood up and brushed himself off. “And now I shall retire. Good night, Carly.”

“Good night, Solas. Happy wandering.”

He smiled down at her, faint within the shadows of his hood, and walked off to the tent. She banked the fire and stood up herself, stretching out her legs. She figured she should find out how much Bull had overheard, just to be on the safe side, and went over to him.

“Gonna stay up all night, Iron Bull?”

“I might. Seemed you needed a quiet space to talk.”

“I appreciate it, although you don't have to. Stay up, I mean. I'm sure Harding's got scouts all over. You weren't eavesdropping by any chance, were you?”

“Who, me?”

“Yeah, you, Ben-Hassrath.”

He grinned, his face crinkling with it. “I get the impression you know exactly what that means, Herald of Andraste.”

“I do.”

“Unusual for one outside the Qun.”

“Yeah, I bet it is. But that's me, the special case.”

“Special,” he echoed, tone dry. “You would have to be, wouldn't you?”

“You have no idea,” she said fervently. “Anyway, you didn't answer my question.”

“I wasn't really listening,” he said, tilting his horned head to eye her. His patch gleamed in the soft moonlight filtering through the hazy clouds. “Doesn't matter to me what two elves have to talk about.”

“All right, I'll pretend I believe that as long as you keep it to yourself. By the way, it's warmer by the fire. I'm going to bed. Wake me or one of the others in a few hours to take over, okay? I don't want you falling asleep on the job tomorrow.”

“Hey,” he protested.

“Just a thought.”

“Huh.”

“Good night, Bull.”

“Lavellan.”

What It's Worth

Chapter Notes

3/31/20

Longer chapter than normal, but I don't think anyone will complain.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Snow fell steadily around her as she crossed from the Chantry to the apothecary's cottage. Solas was outside, watching her approach with his back to the wind, no cloak to protect him from it. She shivered just looking at him, hunched there like he really was a poor, wandering hedge mage.

"The Herald of Andraste returns from afar, bringing tidings of faith renewed." His tone was light and wry. "Word of your success at expanding Inquisition territory precedes you."

"Hello to you too." She chuckled. "Oh, stand up straight, you know that humble pie doesn't work on me."

He raised an eyebrow at her, but he did unfold from his deliberate slouch to his full height. He towered over her, and not for the first time she cursed Dalish body models for being so dainty, and she more than average. It had been quite an adjustment. He gestured to the cottage and she went in, finding it neat and tidy. He was borrowing it from the actual apothecary, who'd moved to set up business in the training grounds for the time being. She noticed little touches that spoke of his travels, along with a stack of books from the Chantry library. She saw her practice bow leaning against the wall next to his plain staff, the quiver of arrows laid out on a counter next to it.

"Nice little place," she said.

"It serves well enough. A roof, a place to lay my head, a comfortable chair to read."

"Or two."

"Sit, please. What brings you out here to my lowly dwelling on such a day?"

"A question on motives. And some company I don't have to be polite to, no offense."

"None taken. I know more than most the difficulties in maintaining a facade." He gave her a rare sly smile. It transformed his face and her brain short circuited. *That's becoming a problem, Carly.*

"Indeed," she managed.

He sat down opposite from her, slouched with his ankles crossed loosely. It was a bit shocking to see him so...indolent. An *at least* eight thousand year old elf shouldn't be so relaxed. Still, it was a good look for him, and she could picture him, much younger, much more carefree, lounging in Arlathan. She took in the planes of his face, assessing the near mathematically perfect symmetry of his features.

"Did all the Evanuris look like you?" she asked before she could stop herself. He raised a brow at her and she felt her cheeks burn. Not exactly what she wanted to say. And not exactly a subject she

wanted to delve too deep into, knowing how bitter he was about them.

“In what sense?”

“Tall, sharp angles everywhere. I mean, you know you could cut glass on those cheekbones, right? Don't get me started on that jawline. Your build is...unnaturally perfect.”

“Is that jealousy from the Dalish I am detecting?”

“Maybe a little,” she laughed. “Skinny I can live with, but short? Pfft, I hate having to use a step stool to reach everything.” He chuckled and she grinned, happy to veer away from the touchy subject even a little. But he turned more serious, contemplating.

“To answer your question...” He trailed off, lost in thought. *In memory*, she realized.

“Hey, you don't...I didn't mean to bring up painful stuff. It's not important.”

“There was most certainly a desire to be more 'perfect', as you say. There could be no faults or deviations from the accepted and expected aesthetic among the gods, after all.” He gave her a sardonic look. She wondered how much of that lack of acceptance he'd suffered, considering his tone implied it was there.

“Right, only the unwashed, servile masses were allowed mundane things like flaws.”

His gaze skittered across her vallaslin, that he hadn't mentioned even once. She'd drawn it herself, with the help of a modder, a piece of custom work that she'd always gotten amusement from. Four red diamonds angled upwards from her eyebrows, while faint black whorls and lines filled the space between them, running down her nose to flare gently across her nostrils. If she'd known how annoying it was to see from the corner of her eye constantly, she would never have gone with it. And to top it all off, now it was embarrassing looking at the object of it across a room. She fought an urge to pull her hair over her face.

“You have no respect, Dalish.”

She blew a raspberry at him. “You're right. Besides, I'm not Dalish, and we both know *they* were not gods. Neither are you. Immortal, yes. Divine, no.”

“History does not care to remember it that way.”

“History is a warped bundle of stories tied loosely with vague memories that were carried from the wreckage of Elvhenan,” she said, again before she could stop herself. *Sure, Carly, let's bring up how this whole mess is his fault, that will help things immensely.*

“Is that your question on motive? Why I created the Veil?”

“Oh, I know why. Every alternative would have been worse, right?” He nodded carefully, forgetting that she already knew all this, it seemed. Or maybe he hadn't considered just *how much* she knew. “Hey, gotta remember, I'm the one who got flung across time and space into another world with your mark in her hand and foreknowledge of...all of this.”

She stuttered at the end, her words mixing with his in her head. *“In another world...”*

Stop it, Carly. Just stop. That's creepy.

“Speaking of which, I have considered your predicament,” he said, drawing her back. “I do not

think I would be able to send you back to your world, at least not without knowing how you came to be here in the first place.”

“Well, shit, I was afraid of that.” She slumped and stared into the fire burning merrily on the hearth. “Well, one thing at a time, I guess. We need to deal with divinely inhabited Magister first anyhow.”

“Divinely inhabited?” He was back to being amused. “You have the most colorful way to express things.”

“Well how would you describe him?”

“He is a Tevinter Magister. A foolish one, at that.” He sounded dismissive.

“I thought Fen'Harel was supposed to be clever.” He glared at her now. “Well, all right fine, not divinely, perhaps. But he's certainly inhabited by something. The Blight for sure. He's not *just* a Magister, he's one of the Sidereal ones, who broke into the Fade. Really, what the hell were you thinking letting him get a hold of your orb?”

He glared some more. “I am aware of his misdeeds. The blast in the Conclave was supposed to kill him. I am displeased that it did not.”

“No shit. It's thrown all your plans into absolute chaos,” she said drily. “And now you need us poor pitiful things that aren't even real people.”

“Be careful where you tread, Carly.”

She cocked her head at him, exasperated. “You think I don't know that's how you see this world? Divided from magic at the source, your own people diminished to a guttering spark of what they were. The humans taken over like locusts. Qunari banging at the door to take over in their own way every couple decades. Everything you worked for is gone and you want to fix it. I told you before, I don't disagree with your ideals. Just your methods.”

“Tell me what is worth saving of this miserable world,” he shot back, ire rising. He sat up from his sprawl with a jerk, his posture turning supercilious. “Yes, my people were enslaved and all that remains are pitiful savages. It's dirty and backward, with no elegance or civilization. Tell me what is worth preserving in that.”

“Everything they fought for despite their limitations,” she replied, softening her tone and keeping her temper in check. Pissing him off wouldn't do her any favors. “Solas, you do realize, I hope, that a large part of the reason this world is so miserable to your eyes is *because* of the Veil?”

He seemed to be working to calm himself as well, and he took a moment to stir up the fire before he spoke again. “I did what was needed. Anything else...”

“Yeah, I know. And you woke up to where everyone's conscious connection to the Fade was cut off, and it was like walking through a world of Tranquil.”

“That sounded like quoting.”

She smiled sadly. “It was. I was quoting you, in fact. Believe me, I fully understand why you think you need to restore the elves to their former glory, but tearing down the Veil to rewrite reality isn't the way to do it.”

“What would you know of it?” he scoffed.

“Let's see. You felt driven to imprison the Evanuris for murdering Mythal, and it stripped you of nearly all your power to put up the Veil. You spent the last several thousand years sleeping it off, more or less. And while dreaming in the Fade through all those centuries, you were helpless to stop what remained of the Elvhen from being conquered by Tevinter and enslaved or impoverished. Those that did not submit eventually became nomads, losing more and more of their history and heritage along the way. You know, the Dalish legends say you hid in a corner of the Fade and laughed with glee when you heard of it. But it wasn't glee, was it? It was the terrible, maddening truth that everything you worked for fell apart even with all you'd done. Is that enough of what I know about it for you?” she snapped.

“You know too much,” he growled.

“I'm stuck in this body, Solas. A body that is not mine. Too short, too skinny, too overlooked but for the mark in my hand. You know Cassandra wanted to execute me, right? She wanted to execute you too. Zealotry wields an ax indiscriminately. Think about that for a second. I'm stuck in this world too, unless we can figure out how I got here. So forgive me if I don't want you to destroy it.”

His temper subsided, but he still looked mulish. “The People deserved better.”

“I agree. But tell me, how would bringing down the Veil *now* accomplish that objective? Sure, the Fade would no longer be locked away, but neither would the Evanuris, would they?”

“I have plans for that.”

Hearing him say it aloud, in real life, hit her so much harder than she'd expected. All wrong, this was all wrong and out of order and going nowhere good. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Look, I didn't mean to pick a fight. But I *did* want to talk about this. C'mon, you and I can only be our real selves with each other. It's to both our benefits if we get along.”

He echoed her long exhale. “You are right, and I must accustom myself to the idea that you already know all of this. I'm sorry.”

“I...can't. I'm sorry.” And then he turned away. The image rose unbidden in her head and she heard him take a sharp breath.

“What was that?”

“Oh no, that kind of foreknowledge is not something I'm going to put in your possession. Nuh uh.” She scrubbed her face with her hands. “I want us to be friends, Solas. Because, honestly? You and Varric are all I have here. I didn't ask to be the Herald of Andraste, especially knowing she's no more a deity than you are.”

“Would that I was.”

“You don't mean that. You never wanted to be a god. It turned you from your purpose.” He gave her a sharp look, and she wondered if she'd gone too far. Which was funny, since she'd flat out called his plans terrible to his face and picked a fight with him about his own shortcomings. “We have bigger problems coming. Like Corypheus. He's going to come for me, and when he does...”

“Yes?”

“The Inquisition will need a new home.”

“You say that as if I have some bearing on the matter.”

“Well, you do have a giant fortress at your disposal.”

He raised a brow at her. “In ruins. Why would I offer it?”

“Because if you don't, the Inquisition will likely fail, Corypheus will succeed in using the orb to rewrite reality the way *he* wants it and I will likely be dead. Which may not matter to you, in the long run, but it matters to me.”

“You truly expect I will take the Inquisition to...?”

“Yes,” she interrupted.

“Since you are aware of so many other things, I will assume you also know what it represents.”

“Yes. Ya know, if I hadn't fucked up and given myself away, you would have figured out how much value this world had on your own. It would all have played out so differently. But it didn't, and we don't have the time to start over. I love this world, Solas. And even if you don't want to contemplate it, you will too. We both want to save it. We should work together for that.” She stood up, feeling like she'd been run through a wringer. “Ugh, I need to shoot something.”

“Your target remains outside.”

“Thanks.” She picked up her bow and quiver and started to head to the door.

“Carly, for whatever it is worth, it matters to me that you live.”

“You're just saying that because you need the Anchor back. You just can't take it until you get stronger. Don't deny it.”

“That is not the only reason. You have a rare spirit. I cannot remember the last time someone dared to force me to face unpleasant truths against my will and lived to tell the tale.”

“*The slow arrow breaks in the sad wolf's jaws.*” Not all the legends of Fen'Harel were exaggerated, and she should probably remember that too.

“Well, I got that going for me, I guess.” She gave him a final smile; it felt brittle on her lips. “I'm not going to tell anyone else what will happen. Well, maybe Varric, at least about Corypheus. He's faced him before. But telling the rest doesn't serve any purpose and would make all of this that much harder.”

“I will think on what you've said. Carly, you *are* welcome here, should you feel the need to just be yourself.”

She met his eyes and saw that his offer was genuine. “Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm thinking of going to twice weekly updates for this during this time of quarantine and lockdown. Yea or nay?

Tea and Flowers

Chapter Notes

4/3/20

Carly let the door of the cottage slam behind her. Solas looked up from his book in his stuffed armchair near the fire. He must have known she was back, since a steaming cup of tea sat on a tiny pedestal table across from him, next to the other armchair. Funny how much things had changed in just a few months. A whole season of aching slow progress to grow the Inquisition's forces, battle demons back across the Veil and close rifts wherever they appeared.

Now she had some new, assorted alliances on her side. Not that she'd get to enjoy any downtime getting to know them better since Cullen and Cassandra both were harping on her. Instead she'd decided to come here, even with the terrible weather. If nothing else, Solas was good for a quiet moment, and after their rather rough start, they'd forged some trust between each other with a little trial and error. It served well in the field, it served better like this. And she could use it.

"How was Val Royeaux?"

She made a face at him while shaking snow from her hair and stamping the worst of it off her boots. She hung her woolen cloak on the a peg next to the door. She was chilled through; it was a long walk down here from the Chantry in this blustery weather. "It was a pain in my ass. Holy crap, you think you know how the politics work in a world until you're stuck in it." She threw herself into the chair and let the fire steam the wet from her boots. She took up the cup of tea and sipped it. "Ooh, that's good, Solas. You've nearly got it."

"I have had practice," he offered dryly.

She snorted over the rim of the cup and his eyes met hers. "I know you have," she said softly, almost conspiratorially. "I also know you hate the stuff."

"I do not mind trying to find you something to remind you of home."

He sounded like he really meant that, and more than the tea warmed her up. A dangerous urge rose in her to say something snarky, a defensive mechanism against how touched she was. She squashed it. "I appreciate it, truly."

He went back to his reading and she sipped her tea. She always enjoyed his company, even when they argued about the future and his plans. The quiet was better, though, talking about the Fade or just sitting like this. His borrowed cottage had become her favorite place in Haven. She wondered how much of that was going to translate to the rotunda of Skyhold. She hoped it would.

"You're thinking about it again," he said softly. He was dipping into her surface thoughts. It wasn't invasive, but it led to strange, half disjointed conversations from time to time. He did try to refrain from bringing it up in mixed company, but knew she didn't usually mind it when they were alone.

"Ayup."

"You do that often."

“Of course I do, it's home.”

He looked startled, either by the words or the loving undertone she couldn't help. “Is it?”

She decided not to plumb that depth and changed the subject. “Tell me what you think of Dorian.”

He made a face. “A Tevinter mage, Carly? Is he truly necessary?”

“Judging much, Solas?”

“A pampered noble from a nation where slavery is the common practice and reckless use of magic has led us to where we are now,” he said in a condemning growl. She smiled, he was so easy to ruffle sometimes.

“Sounds like someone I know. Honestly, I'm surprised you haven't found more common ground together.”

“Excuse me?”

She bit her lip to keep from laughing at his outraged expression. “Solas,” she said patiently, “you do realize that you are very much alike? He's turned his back on his homeland, and everything that goes with it, and believe me, he will learn just how wrong he is about a lot of things if you take the time to show him. Reminds me an awful lot of this other guy I know from once upon a time, who rebelled against the common practice of slavery and his pampered upbringing and ended up using a reckless amount of magic to bring us where we are today. You both suffer from Terminal Superior Male Disease, always thinking you have all the answers to the world's problems. Maybe that's the trouble, huh.”

He grunted and she let it go. While needling him was fun, she tried not to push it too far. She liked him too much to truly want to piss him off. She suppressed a grin and finished her tea, keeping her face perfectly innocent to the brink of absurdity.

“I deserved that, I suppose.” He marked and closed his book, standing up to take her teacup.

“More?”

“Sure, as long as there's something to nibble to go with it.” A mental picture rose and she stomped on it. *Stop it, Carly, he's not that kind of snack.* The tips of his ears went red and she quickly thought of some earworm to play in her head, amplifying the volume to aggressive levels. *Somebody once told me, the world was gonna own me...*

“That song is atrocious,” he said mildly from the behind the counter of the shop portion of the cottage.

“Then stop listening to it.” He sighed. “Hey, it's your own fault for hearing shit you don't want to, lethallin,” she said, saccharine sweet.

“I worry about you.”

“That's an excuse for dipping? I'm pretty sure you know by now I won't betray you.”

“This strain...” He came back with a fresh cup, piping hot, and a plate of crackers and cheese. She practically attacked them before he was done setting the plate down, to his faint amusement. “This isn't your world. And you say there is a long road ahead, with many trials upon it. Surely someone is allowed to be concerned for your welfare?”

“Oh, actual worrying.” She snorted. “I guess that's nice of you, then.”

“What did you do on the other side, in your real life?” The change of subject was abrupt, but she allowed it, since she'd done it to him too.

“I think *previous* life is a better way to put that, don't you? Doesn't look like I'll be going back to it.”

“Lethallan,” he said, chiding. “That was not an answer.”

She stuck her tongue out at him. “I'm making my peace with it. And to answer your question, I was an experimental tech beta researcher.”

“A what?”

She snickered. It was always amusing to throw terms like that around him. He didn't follow them, but he knew them as truth with all his dipping into her head. He didn't look at her sideways like some of the others did when she forgot she needed to be role playing. He didn't judge her foul language and bluntness. She wasn't sure his calming presence was because of his Fade studies teaching him exquisite control over himself or because he was an ancient elf. Or both. Either way, she loved throwing him off his stride just to see if she could.

“I tested new products for businesses...merchants...before they were released to the public.” She blew across the tea and sipped it cautiously, knowing it was still very hot. It hit her nose just the right way. He'd gotten it perfect. “Oh, Solas...this is it.”

Unexpectedly, tears sprang into her eyes. She might complain about his dipping and seeing things she didn't want him to, but it had also served to let him lift the memory of the perfect cup of tea and recreate it. He smiled down at her, the firelight catching glints in his eyes. The air changed in the little cottage, becoming thick with something that made her stomach fill with butterflies and her more rational mind instantly wary.

“I am pleased I could provide it.”

“Thank you,” she whispered. A tear fell, running over her cheek before she could stop it. As if time slowed to a crawl, she watched his hand reach out and wipe it away. His thumb was warm on her skin and the glide was gentle. She couldn't remember the last time someone had spontaneously touched her. She needed to break this mood before she got too swept up in it. She couldn't afford to want more than this...not yet.

She knew he caught that when he conspicuously stepped back from her side. She put down the teacup and stood up. Something stupid was going to happen if she didn't leave. But he didn't move and she was trapped between the two armchairs with a roaring fire at her back and him.

“Walk with me tonight,” he said simply. *In the Fade*, he didn't need to add.

“Why?”

“I want to see your world. Understand it.”

“It's not that simple, you know.”

“I can guide you to it, if that is your concern.”

She gave him a sad look. “It's not that. It will only make me miss it.”

“Do you miss it?”

“Of course I do.” Didn't she? “I miss electricity and the internet and my cozy apartment, which honestly, has probably already been rented out to someone else and isn't mine anymore. I miss hot showers and all night diners and coffee shops and junk food and...none of this makes any sense, does it?”

“It doesn't have to, for me to know you are grieved by its loss. I'm sorry I asked.”

She shook her head. “No, it's all right. Only logical you'd be curious. Kinda surprised it's taken this long. I just...I don't know if it's a good idea, that's all.”

“Walk with me anyhow. We can explore other things.”

Something was different in his tone, but she didn't want to examine it too closely. Because it sounded outrageously like flirting, and Solas didn't flirt. Well, hardly. She faced her butterflies head on with her usual blunt style, ignoring the thought that he liked it when she was contrary.

“It's one thing to wake up and know it was a dream, it's entirely another having to look you in the eye the next day and know you were there in it.”

He never smiled wide, even with her in this private space he'd created. But he still smiled enough to show that he was thoroughly entertained. “Drink your tea, Carly.”

He stepped away and went back to the apothecary counter, kneeling down out of sight to look for something. As smooth evasions went, it was in the top five for sure. She glanced absently at the teacup and scooped it up, taking her time to savor each sip. It was never going to be as good as the first time and she knew she should enjoy every bit of it.

That works on levels, she thought. Ugh, not a thought you need to be having right after poking at him.

“Solas, are we good?”

“Always, lethallan,” he said easily, standing back up from behind the counter with a small box in his hand. He handed it to her. “For sleeping.”

She opened the box and saw the small sachet inside it. She lifted it to her nose. “Lavender, chamomile, mint and...” She sniffed again. “What is that?”

“Delphinium.”

She chortled and her mood lightened immeasurably. Ridiculously. He didn't know, how could he? He'd never asked. Her mother was a florist when she was alive. “Wolfs-bane? Oh, Solas, you're adorable, you know that?”

Practically before she could think it through, she leaned up on her tiptoes and kissed his cheek. She pretended that he didn't bend down for her to reach, since even on her tiptoes she was still too short. She pretended she didn't see the tips of his ears blush scarlet. “Totally adorable. And now I'm going, before I do anything else ridiculous. Thank you for the tea.”

Star Gazing

Chapter Notes

It's a Fade date...sorta. 4/7/20

With the sachet under her nose, she did indeed fall asleep quickly. And she did dream. But it wasn't of home, well...not exactly. In the distance she could hear traffic noise, but it was a long way off, like it was held back behind a wall she couldn't see. Around her was the quiet of Haven's streets, empty but well lit by torches. She expected to be cold, but she wasn't, even though snow was still piled up in nooks and crannies. She stood in front of the Chantry, turned her back to it, and looked around, wondering when he'd show up. She knew he would.

"You did not fight it," he said, suddenly appearing next to her as if she'd conjured him out of thin air. She might have for all she knew. She had no idea how this Fade shit worked. Sure, *he* was a Dreamer, but she wasn't...right?

"Were you expecting me to?"

"You often do. You work yourself to exhaustion and then sleep so deeply you do not dream. I am never sure if you are hiding or escaping."

"That makes it sound like you actively look for me," she said and grinned at his slightly abashed expression at being busted. "You have, haven't you?"

"Perhaps," he said and she laughed, strongly feeling the urge to poke him until he confessed to just how often. Instead, she walked with him along the road, looking around the town as her mind recreated it, their steps slow. Just a midnight stroll.

"To answer your question...both, I think," she said.

"Why?"

"The Fade is...well, it's pretty terrifying as a concept. To think there is a tangible realm where dreams are made manifest...that is inhabited, no less, by things that pour out from holes in the sky and try to kill me..."

"When you put it like that, I suppose, yes, I can see why you would be apprehensive. Let this be your first lesson, then. What you bring to the Fade is what will manifest within it. Places, memories, people. Spirits act out of intent, emotion forms them." He turned in a circle, gesturing to the town around them. "Do you know why you reached this place? Because it is the part of Thedas with which you are most familiar. In order to explore other parts of the Fade, you must visit other parts of the waking world."

"Yeah, I know. How come Eluvians aren't like that, though? They're connected to the Fade. Well, the Crossroads are anyway."

"How do you know that?" he asked, his expression sharp. She rolled her eyes at him.

"Duh...otherworlder? I know pretty much everything about Thedas. I just haven't experienced it

firsthand.”

“The breadth of your knowledge still has the power to surprise me. Each time I think I have it cataloged, you bring some new information to the fore.” He turned again, looking out across the portions of the Fade she couldn't see, not being as accustomed to it. “Eluvians are a network, attached like spidersilk strands in a web, and contained within a pocket of reality that stands adjacent to the Fade. They remain malleable, but not as much as the Fade itself.” He gave a soft huff. “I expected someone I would have to mentor, to shape, in order to accomplish my goal. You have little need of my guidance.”

“Or your manipulation, hahren,” she teased lightly. It threw him off balance, she'd discovered, when she joked about his plans as if she didn't see them as terrible. Oh, she'd made it abundantly clear that she thought it was a dick move to tear down the Veil. That being said, she couldn't bring herself to hold it against him knowing that he felt trapped by a choice that had split the world in two and reduced his culture to ashes. He only wanted to make it right. She just needed to figure out how to get him to do that without destroying *this* world while he was at it. It needed a more delicate touch than he was used to employing. Blunt force would only ever result in trauma.

“You would likely make a miserable da'len,” he commented dryly, having turned back to face her.

But she wasn't looking at him, in fact she'd barely heard him. There were stars above. The Thedosian sky was still strange and foreign to her, but somehow she'd brought her familiar Earth sky to her dream. “Solas, you wanted to see part of my world. Look up.”

“Fenedhis,” he breathed out and she gasped in mock astonishment. It was so rare to hear him swear, especially to hear him swear with something that had his own name in it. He let his eyes crinkle a bit at the corners, acknowledging the humorous irony, then looked back at the stars. “They are so different.”

“Can you make the torches go out?”

Almost before she was done speaking they were gone, and only starlight shone down on them. She gave herself a crick in her neck trying to see them all at once and gave up with a shrug. She lay down in the street, tucking her hands behind her head on the sharp stones.

“What are you doing?”

“Seeing them better. Come down here, you don't have to crane your neck this way.”

“You will be full of dirt and grit.”

“It's Fade grit.” She shook her head with a laugh. “It's not real.”

He scowled at her before cautiously lowering himself to a sitting position next to her, nearly touching. She gave an impatient huff and tugged his arm so he fell backwards. She might have miscalculated a bit, since the back of his head landed on her chest, but hey, she wasn't complaining. Too much. He, however, sat up and gave her another glare.

“Get down here so I can point out the good ones for you.” She bounced and the ground beneath her wasn't ground anymore. She lifted her head to see a wide expanse of fluffy feather bed had appeared beneath her. She rolled her eyes. “Ugh, heaven preserve me from fastidious gods. I'm not going to ask how you did it, but before you ask, yes, it's much more comfortable.”

“Magic,” he whispered, so close to her ear she shuddered. If he noticed, he gave no sign. He settled next to her and waited for her tutorial of Earth stars to begin.

“Somehow I think it was less magic and more Fade manipulation,” she teased. He made a sound that might have been agreement. “All right, let me get myself oriented.” She wiggled around on the mattress until she saw the Big Dipper. She pointed. “There, the one that looks like a giant ladle. Ursa Major, the Great Bear. If you follow the two stars at the end of the cup, you will run directly into true north on Earth. Polaris, the North Star.” He followed her pointing, having shifted so he was next to her again.

“What is the pattern running across the dome of it?” he asked.

“The Milky Way. That's...that's the galaxy Earth's sun is in. We're kinda of out on the edge of it, so we can see across the length of the galaxy like looking down a table. The darker spots in the middle are actually the center of the spiral, where there's a massive black hole.”

“A what?”

“Oh, I see how it is, you know what a galaxy is, and the fact that the planet rotates around its star, but you don't know what a black hole is?” She laughed at his expression when he turned his face to her. “It's a vortex of high gravity, so high that light can't escape it. So it looks dark. And it's a hole because it sucks everything in and compresses it so tight it disappears. Like it...” she shrugged eloquently, “went down a hole.”

He turned on his side, facing her. She looked up at the stars, carefully ignoring his eyes on her. It was not an easy task. She was suddenly excruciatingly aware of how much bigger he was than she in this Lavellan body type. He had nearly a foot on her when they were standing. Somehow, regardless of his leanness, it seemed like he was looming when they were like this. It was unnerving because it was entirely *not* unpleasant.

“Carly.”

“Hmm?”

“Look at me.”

She turned just her eyes, saw him leaning on his elbow as casually as anyone. It didn't seem right that a being as old as he was should look so comfortable being so...comfortable. She couldn't even explain why. Nor was it the first time he'd done something that just jarred with her image of him in her head.

His free hand cupped her jaw and turned her head, unwaveringly patient. It stayed there, splayed out across her throat and she could feel her pulse against his fingers. He was just looking at her, his light eyes sparkling in the starlight and she froze, overcome with something she wasn't ready to face. She was sure he was going to lean down and kiss her, but he didn't. She wondered what he was seeing in her expression, if he could see that she wanted it pretty desperately, but she was so afraid. Even if it was just a dream.

He smiled gently and the hand on her throat moved to her shoulder, then her arm, and he drew her into him. She buried her face under his chin. A sound escaped her, sort of strangled and muffled. She couldn't tell if it was a sob or a laugh. Maybe both, maybe neither. It was the kind of sound a wounded animal might make.

“It has been too long since someone worried for you, I think,” he said softly, taking her back to their earlier conversation. His control over the Fade was so powerful she could feel the vibration of him speaking, just as she could smell his skin. Warm herbs, leather and linen, the faintest whiff of ozone from his magic. Something uniquely him. *Ugh, Carly, cliché much?*

“Yes,” she managed to force out without crying. It was a near thing and she felt like she was going to choke on it. She wondered if he could relate. She assumed so.

“Shh,” he whispered into her hair. “Thank you for showing me your stars.”

She drew in a ragged but deep breath and pulled her head back to look at him. “Thank you for bringing me to the Fade.”

He pressed his lips to her brow for an instant, and tucked her head back under his chin. His arms pulled her into his body tightly and she trembled as she lay there in his embrace, hesitantly letting her own arms go around him. It wasn't anything like she expected. She had no idea how long they stayed that way, but when she woke, she was in her bed in the Chantry, the sounds of the town waking up around her. And she realized she had liked the feeling of his arms around her and missed it now that it was gone.

Curses of the Gods

Chapter Notes

4/10/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Thunk.

Thunk.

Twang.

“Oh, fenedhis lasa,” she swore conversationally, watching the arrow sail past the target and into the snow, buried fletching deep. She heard a snort behind her, but didn't turn her head to smirk at him. She consciously bent her elbow more and drew back again, holding the arrow steadier than she had months ago. “So which came first, you or the curse word?”

She let fly and had a moment of absolute triumph when it hit dead center on the target. Only then did she lower the bow and turned to look at him. He had a calm but cunning look about him, an expression she got to see much more often now when it was just the two of them. *Resting wolf face.*

“I would imagine that I did, although I highly doubt they are related instances.”

“I wouldn't be so sure of that. Expletives based on deities' body parts seem to be the norm. Maker's Balls, Andraste's Tits, et cetera. It humanizes the impossible while still taking gleeful pleasure in the blasphemy.” She went back to her shooting and heard his steps crunch lightly on the snow as he approached her. His presence behind her was solid and warm, and didn't bother her nearly as much as it should. She pretended he wasn't there and drew her arm back, feeling the play of her own muscles as she did.

“Did you sleep well?” he asked, his breath tickling her ear as she released the string. The arrow wobbled and sank into the target nearly at ground level. She whirled around and pushed against him, making him squawk in surprise. He was still half bent in the position he'd used to whisper in her ear without touching her.

“Ooh, you did that on purpose!” she growled, but playfully, batting at him with her free hand. He captured her wrist in a strong grip and laughed freely.

“Did I break your concentration? My apologies, Herald.” Mirth danced in his eyes, utterly entrancing.

“Oh, bite me, you...*ass.*”

For a moment, fleeting but enough to make her heart stutter, something lit in him like a live coal. It was hot and so carnal she couldn't breathe. She suddenly grew very aware of how they were standing, squarely in each other's personal space, his grip on her wrist warm and firm, her leg between his. She had to tip her head back to see his face and all at once tension coiled in her belly like a spring pulled taut. And then it was gone, and she saw the sequence she'd hoped to never see

on his face for real. Shifting from joyous to cautious to sad. It drew a physical ache in her breast and she nearly winced. Game animation had nothing on seeing the light die in his eyes in real time.

“Solas...?” “*No, don't leave me...not now.*”

He let go of her by degrees, stepping back, releasing his grip one finger at a time, as if he couldn't bear it but knew it must be done. She was abruptly cold without him there. “Forgive me, lethallan.”

“For what?” she breathed out, urgently trying to keep the moment alive. She didn't like to see him so distant. It was more awful than she ever thought it would be.

He blinked at her, and she could see the struggle in him to balance what was potential and what should not be. And she wondered if he could detect how much she wanted to recapture what was slipping away. “For overstepping.”

“You didn't.” She cocked her head at him. “Solas, haven't you ever had...fun? Like, the silly childhood kind? Were you ever a child at all?”

If anything, the melancholic look grew deeper and she regretted asking. But he didn't turn away from her as she feared he would. “If I was, it was too long ago to remember.”

“And it wasn't like what I would expect, is that it?”

He raised an eyebrow and she wondered if no one had ever asked him these things before. No one who didn't already know the answers. Because he hadn't been *born*, not of a woman anyway. “*He never wanted a body,*” she heard Cole say in her head, soft and dreamy. She clamped down on the memory before Solas could hear it.

“I'm sorry, that was...prying *way* too deep. Forget I asked.” She marched across the space between where they stood and the target and pulled her arrows. She tried to collect herself as she gathered them and fully expected to turn back and see he'd gone. But he was still there, watching her as she walked back. He had a curious look on his face, as if she was a puzzle he wanted to decipher without outright asking for clues. She let him look at her, let him take his time. This was the gray area of their friendship that wasn't quite more, but certainly wasn't less.

“You know so many things you should not,” he finally said. It wasn't with his usual censure, just a statement of fact.

“I do. And my mouth disconnects from my brain sometimes. I really am sorry. *I overstepped.*”

He nodded, accepting her apology and stepped back further, giving her space. She grounded herself with a deep breath and determinedly turned back to the target, raising her bow. There was quiet then, other than the solid impact of her arrows in the leather bound hay bale. She was reaching for another arrow when the bow slipped across her palm, rubbing the Anchor the wrong way. It stung far more than she expected and she dropped the bow, cradling her hand.

“Carly, are you all right?” Solas asked in a rush. She kept her back turned to him. It was hardly the first time this happened. She really should start wearing a glove over it if she knew she was going to be shooting, but she didn't like losing the feel of the wood in her hand. She'd worked up a good callous when her hand was in the right place on it.

“I'm fine.”

“Let me see.”

"I'm *fine*, Solas." He moved into her line of sight, still trying to capture her hand and she swung away from him again. It was silly, she knew, but she also didn't think she could meet his eyes right now, not with this unspoken *thing* hanging between them.

She heard him make an exasperated noise and then his arms were around her from behind, his grip tight and solid on her left wrist, his right hand prying her fingers back. She was well trapped in his embrace and cursed once again how tiny she was in comparison. He was much stronger than he appeared, something she was constantly forgetting.

"That's an unfair advantage," she pouted.

"I cannot help that you are small," he said, rumbling right in her ear as he looked over the mark. "And stubborn."

"Takes one to know one," she managed with some degree of her usual snark and he snorted appreciatively. It was admittedly hard to maintain any irritation with him all around her like this.

He flattened his palm against hers and she could feel his magic seep into her hand, soothing and warm. Without really thinking about it, she relaxed against him, her back resting against his chest. She let out a shaky breath as the sting eased. It wasn't healing precisely, more like stabilizing. Calming. He shifted around her, taking her weight without comment. He released his magic and traced his fingers along the edges of the green scar. She shivered, not from any cold but merely the sensation. Her nerves were already strung tight and his gentle touch was just making it harder to think.

"How often does this happen?" he murmured, still in her ear. "Do not think to evade."

She huffed and gave in. "Too often."

"You need a glove."

"I know. But...then I don't have as much control on the bow. I can't tell how I'm holding it."

"Touch is that important to you?"

His words penetrated the fog in her brain with a sharp feeling that he was no longer talking about her hands on her bow. She had a choice. She could either ignore the temptation to flirt further or she could see how far it went. Really, as if it was much of a decision. A flirtatious Solas was just as much fun as the rare playful side.

"Touch is very important," she said, pitching her voice low. "I like knowing where my hands are."

She rested the back of her hand in his palm and spread her fingers, an invitation to twine them together. He took it, somewhat to her surprise. He pulled their joined hands up over her shoulder and she felt his lips against her skin, directly in her palm. She closed her eyes and sank a little heavier into his support, her breath completely halted in her throat. Her brain went utterly blank and silent, focused on just the feeling of his kiss on her and he chuckled. Whatever invisible line stood between them had burned to ash and she couldn't shake the feeling that they'd just entered a new phase of their friendship.

"Well then," he said. "I have learned something new today."

Rational thought returned in a rush and while she wanted to pull her hand from his, she didn't. His other arm had settled around her loosely and she simply couldn't bear to break the moment. It was nice to stand there, leaning on each other where no one could see.

“Smooth as fuck,” she whispered, shaking her head. He chuckled again, dropped another kiss into her hand and continued to hold her. She leaned her head back against him and just breathed. This was what she was afraid of, but in the moment, she couldn't remember why.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Passover and Easter to whoever celebrates those among my readers, for whatever it's worth this year.

On a lighter note, I hope you all enjoyed the sillier side, as well as the brewing hotter side.

Equally Stubborn

Chapter Notes

4/14/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was crowded in Haven now as more and more refugees began trickling in, although Carly supposed she should be happy the fledgling Inquisition was growing. But she could barely turn around without someone calling her 'Your Worship' and asking for more of her time, or resources. She would gladly have taken a trip back into the Hinterlands just for some quiet, uncomplicated fighting.

And then she got her wish.

She walked down to Solas's cottage and saw him standing outside, staring into space and occasionally waving his arms around like he was holding an argument with himself. He stopped when he saw her, face brightening in welcome, eyes shrewdly assessing her well worn armor as if he knew this wasn't a social call.

"So, is the constant madness of having people around getting to you too?" she asked, a lead in to her real question.

"That is a safe assumption to make," he replied. She grinned.

"Want to take a run with me into the Hinterlands and deal with a rift?"

"Just you and I? Is that...wise?"

"We'll be meeting with Harding and her scouts on the way. We have a camp near where I need to go. If we need any backup, they'll be there."

He gave her a long look, part yearning for quiet, part worry about not taking a full crew, part worry that being alone with her might make things awkward. Funny how well she could read the minute changes in his expression now. She wondered if he did that to her, or just used dipping into her head to tell. Finally he nodded and ducked into the cottage to grab his travel pack and staff, a new one she'd recently given him as an upgrade. She knew at some point he wouldn't need one at all, but as long as he was posing as a mortal mage, he needed to act the part.

Plus she knew he got frustrated at the Veil for sapping his abilities. Which made her giggle.

They rode off, leaving the general bustle behind them, and both took a deep breath of winter air and smiled at each other when they saw they'd acted in tandem. They made the camp in fewer hours of hard riding than she'd need with the whole group. There was little conversation between them, which suited them fine. The sun was just setting as they rode into the Inquisition camp.

"Ahh, Herald," Harding called when they'd dismounted. "You're timely. The scouts still report demon activity near the rift, of course. They've been able to keep it contained to just that area, but it'll be nice not to have to worry about it anymore."

There was a hopeful look on the dwarf's face and Carly couldn't help but grin at her. "You hoping I'll ask you to come along and see the action? I'll warn you now, it's not very interesting. Lots of holding my hand in the air and leaving my back open while I concentrate."

"All the more reason to have someone on your rear. I'm surprised you didn't bring anyone else." She glanced at Solas, who was wandering off to put their packs into one of the numerous tents.

"Too many people around me lately," Carly said, and Harding nodded in understanding.

"Yeah, I can see how it would grate. Offer's open, though."

"Thanks, I'll take it. Let's do some recon and see what we've got. How far is the rift?"

"Half a klick maybe? I guess we were lucky we were so close. I heard the pop fizz kind of sound they make, and we were already on the defense when the first demons came out."

"All right, let's go." Carly waited for Solas to come back out and jerked her head for him to join them. They hiked into the densely packed trees and in the gloaming Carly could see the glow of the rift long before they reached it. They got into some cover behind the trunks before they drew any attention and she counted the demons. "Shit, maybe I should have brought the gang. Well, we're here, might as well get it over with."

"Are you certain you wish to close it now?" Solas asked.

"You want to wait until morning when there will be more of them?"

"You have a point," he conceded.

She and Harding readied their bows and Solas cast a barrier around them all. They stepped out from their cover and began shooting. The demons were idle at first, but started to gang up on them before she was within reach of sealing the rift. She grabbed a handful of caltrops from her pouch and tossed them – an automatic reflex now – belatedly realizing they wouldn't do much against mostly incorporeal beings. Only the sludgy one got caught in them, snagging it enough that she could put two arrows where its face should be, making it collapse into a heap of Fade...stuff.

She heard Solas's staff hit stone and a brilliant multi-directional arc of ice filled the little glade, freezing the others all simultaneously and she took her chance to push the bit of Fade back where it belonged. Harding picked off the frozen demons one by one. Her hand ached but the rift closed with a pop and a small explosion that blew her back on her feet.

"Wow," Harding said when it was over. "That's really...something."

Carly looked at the melting ice and demon ooze, the half splintered trees and muck and just nodded. It was about normal. Then she noticed Solas slumped to his knees, leaning heavily on his staff.

"You all right?" she cried, hurrying to see if he was hurt.

"I seem to have expended too much energy," he muttered under his breath. She bit her lip to keep from laughing. Joking about his 'weakness' as an apostate wouldn't help.

"Well, you *did* freeze the whole lot solid in one go while maintaining a barrier. The price you pay for posturing," she couldn't help but tease, remembering at the last second to stay quiet enough that Harding didn't hear her. "You really need to eat more, lethallin."

He glared at her, but didn't stop her from helping him to his feet. He was so tired he staggered, and she heaved a mocking sigh and draped his arm over her shoulders to support him. Harding collected their spent arrows and they made their way back to camp, none the worse for wear but him.

"I hope you have a good dinner planned, Harding," Carly said as they emerged into the torchlight of camp.

"I think the scouts were going to roast a whole ram," the dwarf returned with a grin.

"Oh good." Carly gave Solas a silently vehement look and he made a face. "Eat something, you stubborn thing. Eat your fill of it."

"I would not eat the camp out of their stores entirely."

"Solas, do you want me to have to tuck you into your bedroll like a child later? You need the calories, you burned too many. Stop arguing with me and fucking consume something more than a cup of tea you hate and a biscuit. There's a difference between being overly picky to maintain a fiction and eating the Inquisition out of house and home. Find a middle ground."

He sputtered and bristled, but lacked the energy to give it real heat and she just gave him a look that spoke volumes on her opinion of his opinion.

"Besides, you aren't in uthenera anymore, I need you to get stronger. It only gets harder from here."

He subsided at that, and nodded. "You are right."

"Yeah, I know I am. That happens on occasion." She let his arm fall off her shoulder and left him to sputter some more as she ducked into their tent to change out of her armor. She then saw to it that he ate double helpings of everything served for dinner, while ravenously filling her own plate too. A fresh roast like this was rare in Haven, where too often she arrived at the table to find everything already picked over or cold. She might be the Herald of Andraste to the public, but in the confines of the Inquisition's base she was a fairly low priority. Especially with hungry soldiers and refugees to worry about.

It took a while for Harding's scouts to relax around her, but once they did, there was laughing, jokes, stories and even horrible singing that drove Solas into the tent early. She shared a cup of something nameless and alcoholic with the scouts before retiring and felt much better about life in general.

Solas was still awake when she slipped into the tent and secured the front of it against the cold air. A small mage light hovered over his head and he was reading something. Good, he was feeling better. She absently went about her usual nighttime routine while traveling and didn't notice that he'd stopped reading until he spoke.

"Thank you, Carly."

She turned and saw him watching her carefully, something banked deep in his eyes that she couldn't read in the low light. It seemed he was thanking her for a variety of reasons, but at least they were all genuine, given his tone. She smiled at him before she crouched down behind the privacy of their stacked packs to shimmy out of her pants.

"You're welcome."

The frigid air on her bare skin made her hiss. She heard him chuckle as she drew on thick woolen

leggings. They weren't scratchy as she'd expected since they hadn't been treated chemically like they would be in her world. But it was a few moments before they warmed to her body temperature and in the meantime she just shivered, complete with teeth chattering.

"Are you cold?" he asked, perfectly guileless. She popped her head over the packs and saw he'd ostensibly gone back to his book although he didn't seem to be actually reading.

"Yes. I wish we could have a brazier in here. I'm fucking freezing."

He smirked. "Come here, then." To say shock went through her would be an understatement. A lot more than shock went through her, but she knew she shouldn't let it show. And judging from the widening of his smirk, it wasn't lost on him. "You have slept perfectly safe in my arms before."

"Yeah, in the *Fade*."

"A notable feat in and of itself," he continued. "Still, I am warm and you are not. You bullied me into regaining my strength. I shall take the opportunity to point out that you are equally as stubborn when it comes to your own well being."

"Ugh, fine." She grabbed her bedroll to give them more layers and stomped across the small space. He let her spread out the extra roll and moved over so she could slide in next to him. She waited for it to feel awkward as he turned on his side behind her back, dousing the mage light. Only the glow of the fire gave them any illumination now. He settled around her, reaching for her hand with the Anchor. Somewhat to her own bemusement, she let him.

"I did not ask earlier if it was bothering you." He massaged his thumb against the mark, soothing it.

"You were a bit busy being a mess of spent mana," she said. He huffed, blowing the hair across the back of her neck with it. She shivered again, but not from the cold.

"I get the feeling you will not allow me to forget."

"Yes, well...I have a tendency to forget what you're doing to keep hiding from the world. Sorry if I got carried away."

"You did not. I suppose it is taking me longer to grow accustomed to being...awake. I have not undergone many of the more ritualized steps one would normally do upon coming out of such a long sleep."

"Was it common to sleep so long? Back then, I mean."

"I would not say common," he offered, still pressing soothing tingles into her hand. She realized then that she'd completely relaxed against him, spooned up together like it was nothing out of the ordinary. "Many who went into uthenera had no intention of ever waking again."

He finished with her palm and worked both hands on her fingers and wrist, loosening the tension she carried there almost all the time now. It was brisk and impersonal but that didn't stop her from becoming boneless in his grip. He finally let her go and tucked himself more comfortably behind her, his hand coming to rest on top of the bedroll over her hip. She wanted to roll over, to face him and whatever looming thing was between them without the light of day to make her rethink it, but even in the dark she knew that was a bad idea.

"Thank you, Solas, it feels much better."

"I am pleased. Now go to sleep."

“Yes, hahren.”

He nudged her hip with his and more than heat flooded her, short circuiting her brain. “Enough of your sass, da'len. Sleep.”

She closed her eyes and was glad he couldn't see her smile. She was asleep in minutes.

Chapter End Notes

Find the tropes! I had such fun writing this chapter.

Stepping Out of Time

Chapter Notes

4/17/20

Content Warning Very mild gore and depiction of a panic attack.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She inhaled deep before knocking on the door of the apothecary's cottage. Normally she would just go in after announcing her presence, but not this time. She heard his footsteps cross the small space and he opened the door to her, a slight frown forming when he saw it was her. She exhaled in a slow controlled measure.

“You knocked?” he asked, confusion plain.

“I did. Because I...needed the formality. Because I have something to ask you that will go well beyond any realm of politeness, regardless of how close we've become.”

He cocked his head and regarded her with cool, measuring eyes. Then he reflected her formality. “Come in, Herald.”

He closed the door behind her and gestured to her usual chair but she shook her head. “Just let me get this out, please.”

“I am beginning to become concerned.”

“I bet,” she huffed. “Okay, so you know that I have to go back to Redcliffe, right?”

“Yes.”

“Because the mages are being brainwashed by the Venatori. The Magister, Alexius, he's in league with Corypheus. You remember how odd it was there? It's because...there's...he's going to...”

“Carly, take your time.”

She straightened up, letting his gentle tone soothe a balm onto her anxiety over this. It gave her enough mental strength to conjure up a smirk and a light tone. “That's the problem, I can't. He's going to displace it again, and me with it.”

Solas was quiet as he processed her words, thought through everything they'd seen there. He'd rightly guessed at the time that Dorian would be someone important to her, and she remembered them squabbling over that. Finally, he focused back on her. “You know how he's doing it.”

“Yes. He's got an amulet. It never worked, they – that is, Dorian and Felix – thought it was just an exercise in theory. Then the Breach happened. Well, more specifically, Corypheus happened.”

“And he will use it to warp time around you rather than himself.”

“Yes. If this was the game, it would be twice. Once to send me, and once to bring me back.” She

locked her eyes with him. “And I *would* get back. Solas, I don't want to experience this. I don't want to see the future Corypheus intends with my own eyes, where I can't pause it and walk away, where I have to watch as you...”

“As I what?” he asked when she choked and faltered.

He and Cassandra walked through the doors of the castle, finality in every step. The sounds of slaughter, Leliana guarding her and Dorian to her final breath as the doors were splintered open. All of them choked with lyrium poisoning and already so near death it didn't matter. The red haze of it oozing off them like a visceral thing.

“Fenedhis lasa!”

“Yes, fenedhis lasa,” she echoed. “Solas, I need to know...what can Fen'Harel do to prevent this?”

He looked at her a long time, seeming to understand exactly what she was asking of him. An apostate couldn't be expected to expend more mana than he had, but they both knew he had no such limitations other than secrecy. Especially now that she was getting him to eat more, even if it was just in private. He then paced and she watched his tall figure move back and forth, stately and elegant. She could not bear the thought of seeing him so broken by a year of systematic torture. But it was a risk for him to divert this, a risk to her too. If he showed too much of himself, particularly in front of other mages, it could upset everything she wanted to achieve. For both of them.

“Carly, still your mind, it is distracting,” he said.

“Sorry. Should I just come back later?”

“No. I need to know the sequence of events, the minute details.”

“I'll...try.”

“Visualize it. It would be faster.”

She closed her eyes and thought about the scene, Alexius's hand rising with the amulet, activating it as Dorian attempted to force it aside, the flash of light. The warping vortex of magic sucking her and Dorian in. She made an involuntary sound, and felt Solas's hands on hers.

“It will require exquisite timing, but it is manageable.” He lifted her hand with the Anchor, turned it over to examine it. “It will not even be difficult. It will, however, require your trust. Do you?”

“Most of the time, yeah.”

“It is a serious question,” he scowled, ego pricked.

“I trust you in this.” She gave him a helpless smile. “I've already trusted you with my life several times over.”

“That is true, I suppose,” he said, offering a smile of his own, a much warmer one.

“So how do we manage this?”

It was something simple that wouldn't give him away, but would still be effective. Again and again they'd practiced it until it felt natural to feel his suddenly icy cold hands on her body, shifting her a short distance with himself. At first the shock of it made her stumble afterwards. He kept going

until she could keep her footing upon egress from the spell.

Now it was time. He stood near her, too close if the narrowed eyes of the Seeker meant anything, but enough to make this work. She could only imagine what was going through Cass's mind, two elves in cahoots. Well, she wasn't entirely wrong. Dorian was preparing to strike the amulet away and it would go off as he did. She needed to be ready.

There was the flash and she tensed, anticipating the cold of Solas's hands. They Fade-stepped aside and the blast of magic flew by, searing against her leg as it did before it extinguished in a cloud of green smoke. Only their hours of practice kept his hands on her until she was steady on her feet. She ignored the pain in her thigh and turned to the Magister. Alexius was simply shocked that his plan had failed and it gave them the crucial seconds they needed to strip him of the amulet without further harm. His Venatori were already dead after all. He had no backup.

And practically before she knew it, it was over. Anora and Alistair arrived, berated Fiona - which hurt Carly's heart for reasons she could not name in front of anyone - and she took her chance to offer the mages their choice to join the Inquisition, knowing they had nowhere else to go. Cass didn't like her making them allies, but that was an argument for later. They left Redcliffe as quickly as they arrived. They stopped at an Inquisition camp as the sun went down and Solas approached her at their tent, frowning.

"How bad is it?" he asked, settling himself into a crouch next to her, leaning against his staff. He looked modest and unassuming here with the others. It was strange after weeks of seeing his true self. But with Cassandra with them, she understood the need. She was doing plenty of acting herself.

She thought about hiding the injury from him, but decided it was pointless. He must have read the pain from her surface thoughts. "It feels like a chunk is missing."

"And yet you are not bleeding all over."

"No, I am not. Whatever it did sealed itself like a burn."

"I need to check it."

"Solas..."

"Are you going to argue with me, da'len?" he interrupted before she could refuse his help. "You cannot afford to be injured now. We have spoken of your stubbornness before."

"You just want to get me out of my pants," she tried to snark, but it fell flat. Still, he gave her his sly grin.

"I can think of much better ways to do that. Come on now, do not keep your hahren waiting."

She grumbled under her breath, but didn't fight him when he helped her stand. And then she was glad of his support, because her leg didn't want to hold her. "Shit."

He just gave her a quelling look and helped her into the tent. She collapsed onto her bedroll and he turned his back while she unlaced her breeches and pushed them off her hips. It had become a routine for them, just like sharing a tent had gone unspoken but understood, although they were both cautious to never let it stray beyond occasional flirting. She got the breeches down and stopped short when she saw the mass of exposed muscle and arteries where her thigh should be.

"Solas...?" Even to herself her voice sounded strangled.

“Carly, how did you ride away from Redcliffe like this?” He knelt and passed his hand over her leg, the deep pull of his magic flooding her with a combination of relief and stinging pain as he knit the muscle back together.

“I don't know,” she gasped. “I took a potion when we left and that took the edge off long enough to ride. I guess I didn't think it was this bad.”

“What I do not understand is why you haven't bled out from a wound like this.”

“Maybe because the other part still exists. It's just a year from now.” She hissed as he passed over the wound again, a new layer of tissue growing before her eyes. “Didn't even take the pants with it. Shit, that's mind bending. Fucking magic.”

“I do not like to think about what would have happened if you had caught more of the blast.”

“No kidding. What if it had hit me in the chest instead?”

He glanced up at her, his hand still moving over the healing injury. His face was set in more serious lines than she'd ever seen on him. “You would be dead.”

She couldn't breathe. The enormity of it was too much. She figured she had only one chance to fix things. She didn't know what would happen to her if she died. Would she automatically return to her world? Would she really be dead? It was impossible to know.

“Carly,” he snapped, noticing the panic hitting her. “Look at me. Breathe. It will be all right.”

She tried, but she couldn't focus, couldn't get enough air. There was a buzzing sound blocking out his voice and the edges of her vision were beginning to fade. Her hands felt like they were both burning and freezing and she couldn't stop clenching them. Her heart felt too heavy and like it wanted to escape through her throat. The pressure of it shot her past vague nausea to the point where she gagged to keep from vomiting.

There was a hard thump that reverberated in her chest and the back of her head.

When had she laid down flat?

“Solas?”

“I am here, da'len,” he said, sounding very calm. He was still working on her leg.

“What happened?”

“You fell unconscious.”

“You mean I fainted.”

“Most probably.” He almost sounded like was laughing, but not quite.

“Fuck my life.”

“An interesting turn of phrase.”

“How's my leg?”

“Nearly finished.”

“I'm sorry, Solas.”

“Do not be. You could not have afforded to leave this untended, and I doubt you would have preferred Dorian to see to it and face any awkward questions he might have. You are stubborn but not foolish.”

She sighed. “Yeah, there's already going to be enough questions as it is.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“I'll just say it was the Anchor. Self preservation or some shit. You got caught in it because of proximity.”

He paused and she lifted her head enough to see him looking at her with an expression of thoughtfulness. “A simple enough cover. Thank you.”

“For what? I should be thanking you. I *am* thanking you, come to that.”

He quirked a smile and finished up her leg with cool soothing passes, each one growing weaker, or maybe her leg was just less sensitive now. “You told me once you would not expose me. You are keeping that end of the bargain.”

She made a gesture to his work on her. “Well, so are you. S'only fair.”

He tugged up her breeches and she lifted her hips to help him. It was suddenly too intimate and he backed off as soon as he saw she could do it herself. She managed, despite how weak and exhausted she was, and now he looked it too. Still, she reached out for his hand and he took it, wrapping his fingers around hers for a moment.

“Thank you, Solas. I mean that sincerely.”

“Get some rest, da'len. You still need to recover.”

And then he was gone. She had no memory of him returning, but he was asleep on his side of the tent when she woke.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I have no idea why Fade-step is in the Winter tree instead of the Spirit one. I don't make the rules, I just bend them. But yeah, that's why his hands are cold.

The Waiting

Chapter Notes

4/21/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She packed up everything she owned, which really wasn't much. She tucked the sachet into her breastband – giving it a quick sniff, remembering the star gazing – and gave the tidy room a final looking over before she left it. She knew after today she wouldn't be back to it. Much of the town would be destroyed, and the Inquisition would be on the run. It was harder than she imagined it would be, seeing Haven in its final hours. The camp was still filled with people, going to and fro about their business. The training yard was full and she could hear Cullen's voice over the sound of armor and weapons. If she squinted, she could make out the waking world counterpart to where she and Solas had watched the stars in the Fade. It felt like forever ago, and in some ways it was. For sure it was a tipping point between friendship and...whatever they were now.

She stood in the square after leaving the Chantry and watched the day unfolding from morning's grasp to noon. Bright flowers had sprung up in a crack between cobblestones on the main road. The market was bustling with Inquisition soldiers and mages and townsfolk alike. All of it would be gone in a matter of hours. It was highly unsettling. But she couldn't prevent this, not if the Inquisition was going to move to Skyhold. They needed a reason. This had to go forward as expected. Messing with the events at Redcliffe had been difficult enough, although the excuse that the Anchor was responsible for her sudden dodge of the time magic was readily accepted, even by Dorian, who of course had stayed.

“You don't look so good, Peaches,” Varric said, breaking into her reveries, his short legs nevertheless carrying him with good speed.

“Varric, we need to get these people out of here,” she whispered. Not even the nickname he'd picked out for her could raise her spirits. *You're a rare treat, like peaches and cream.*

“Today, huh?”

“Yeah...today.”

He sighed, his fingers clenching spasmodically. “Who else knows?”

“Solas. But I'll need him with me.” She huffed. “I really want you with me too, to be honest. I know you have no magic to lend to this whole shebang, but still, if you're not with me, I'd worry.”

“You should talk to Leliana, then. Get her working on it.”

“What am I supposed to say? 'Hey, while we're having our victory celebration, the big baddy is gonna come barging in totally pissed off?’”

“Maybe not those exact words.” His tone was dryer than a shriveled up riverbed.

“That's what I love about you, Varric. You're always so supportive.”

He took her hand in his and squeezed. "I know you're probably scared half to death right now, but you can't let these people see that. You're the Herald of Andraste, remember? And today you're going to save all their lives by sealing that Maker damned Breach and by getting their asses out of this town before Corypheus shows up. You got that?"

His steady growl centered her and she took a deep breath. "You're right. That's exactly what I'm going to do."

He gave her one last squeeze and let her go. "Maferath's balls, there are times when I wish you hadn't told me he was still around, but ya know, at the same time..."

"Yeah, I know. You have some things to do, don't you?"

He gave her a sideways grin and nodded. "And you have a Nightingale to sing to."

"Right. See you on the other side, Varric."

"And you, Carly."

She went to Leliana's tent, watching her direct her spies without interrupting as she figured out how she was going to say it. And when she her spymaster was finished and saw her standing there patiently waiting, she was ready to. "I have a concern, that I thought I might bring to your attention."

"Of course, what is it?"

"I'm worried that with so many forces joining me today at the Temple, Haven will be left vulnerable to ambush and attack."

Leliana began feeding her ravens, keeping her attention on Carly, who kept her face carefully neutral. "Just how worried are you?"

There was subtext to that question and Carly realized that she didn't need to try hiding her otherworldly nature from Leliana. She'd already guessed something was different about her, although what she attributed it to was still unknown. "Extremely."

"I shall talk with Josephine and put together an evacuation procedure to be practiced today."

"Thank you. Perhaps you might make it an overnight excursion."

"Perhaps I shall. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me, Mistress Lavellan?" The stress she put on Carly's supposed name wasn't lost on her, but she shook her head.

"Too much would only bring worry."

"It is my job to worry."

"Let's just say I'd rather have you worrying about things we can change."

"We cannot change this...these fears?"

"No."

"I don't suppose I can ask why?"

"You can ask. Doesn't mean I'll answer."

“That is fair,” Leliana said with a small smile. “I do not know if it is the Maker or Andraste Herself who truly looks over your shoulder, or if it is something else entirely, but I am glad you are here. Our fight is better for it.”

“I’m trying.”

“Maker go with you today.”

“Thank you.”

She ducked back out and went to meet with the others. The day was going to be long enough. Sooner started was sooner ended.

Closing the Breach wasn't hard. In fact, after everything else, it was rather anticlimactic. The only good thing about it was Cassandra's pride in her for doing as she'd promised all those months ago. That, and Solas's visible relief that at least a portion of his miscalculations had been reversed, however temporarily.

But it had been draining, and her arm was numb nearly to the elbow and completely useless. Her mood was soured further by knowing that she'd end up having to do this all over again in the not too distant future. With just a quick word to her to move her foot from the stirrup, Solas mounted behind her on her horse, took up its reins in one hand and held her steady with the other. She relaxed and dozed against his chest most of the way back, and only woke when he pulled them to a stop in a clearing outside the stockade walls. The others left them there for a moment of privacy. She wondered idly if people were starting to talk of the Dalish Herald and the apostate elf. Certainly they had a level of intimacy she didn't have with anyone else.

“Carly, we are here.”

“I don't want to do this. He's an Archdemon.”

“No he is not. He is merely a darkspawn.”

She snorted. “No 'merely' about it. He's one of the first. He's enough like an Archdemon that it's not going to make a lick of difference in the fighting. And then I'm...”

He pulled the horse to a full stop as it had started to wander. “And then you will what?”

“I'll lose the fight. I'll destroy the town to save myself and run away. Because I can't kill him yet.”

“I am familiar with that sequence of events.”

“Yeah, I know you are. It sucks dead donkey balls.” He snorted behind her and his arm tightened around her waist, a comforting weight. She reached for his hand and curled her fingers over his. He twined their fingers together and held them tight, a silent support she was more grateful for than she could say. “Solas...”

“Yes?”

“Don't disappear on me,” she whispered.

“I will not, lethallan.”

He clicked his tongue at the horse and they rode into the town, blessedly quiet and empty of

civilians. Cullen was pacing in front of his milling soldiers and the mages were huddled together in a weary group.

“Your Worship!” he called when she and Solas stopped in front of the Chantry. Solas helped her down and made sure her feet were steady under before he let her go, giving her hands a final surreptitious squeeze before he did.

“Yes, Commander?”

“Where is everyone?”

“I believe Leliana and Josephine took them on some sort of preparedness training exercise for the day. I doubt they will be back tonight.”

“The whole town?”

“Yes, I think so.” She straightened her spine to stand as tall as she could. Why the hell did the Dalish have to be so short? She barely stood half a foot taller than Varric, for crying out loud. It didn't do much for her ability to command respect.

“I had assumed there would a celebration for your victory.”

“Soon enough.” *I hope.*

Something passed through Cullen's eyes, something that didn't want to ask any more questions. He had been pissed at her too, for siding with the mages instead of the Templars. He still held out hope that they hadn't all turned rogue. He needed this, she realized, to break that last bond to the order that had shaped his life.

“You are concerned about retaliation from this Elder One, aren't you?”

“Yeah. Cullen, where do you think the Templars went? In the power vacuum left by the Divine's death, who do you think is in charge of them now?”

“Are you so certain of it?”

She gave him a sad nod, let the knowledge sink into him even if he wasn't fully ready to believe her. She knew he would before the night was over. She left him and slipped inside the Chantry to climb up on the battlements. Corypheus would come through the mountain pass after nightfall. There wasn't much else she could do until then but wait and keep watch.

“Carly,” Solas said from the door behind her. She turned and saw him hold out a plate to her. “Eat something before you forget.”

She shook her head emphatically. “My stomach's in knots.”

“Remember what you told me. This is only the first battle. Which means we will all survive to see the next one.”

She shook her head again. “I've changed the playing board. Oh, I know what he'll say, and I know what I'll do. But this isn't the game. Nothing is guaranteed.”

He turned her forcibly away from the view of the mountains and pushed her into a sentry chair by the door. “Eat. You chide me often enough.”

“Fine, hahren.”

“Indeed. Don't make me have to take you over my knee, da'len.”

She choked. He had to have known how it sounded. She glanced at him in the evening light and saw he was smiling without looking at her. “Solas!”

“It was an effective distraction, was it not?”

All she could do was sputter, her brain filled with images she didn't want to see at that moment. His ears began to blush and she knew he was dipping again. Served him right for making her think it. She was so flabbergasted she couldn't even find an appropriate earworm. She bit into the hearty sandwich he'd brought her instead and tried to ignore the strong line of his profile as he took over her watching for her. *Fuck, why does he have to look so good?* And then she tried to smother that thought before he heard it. He needed no further boost to his ego.

Cuz, yeah, it had worked. He'd replaced all her knots with butterflies.

Chapter End Notes

Gotta give props where they're due, Dirthenera's wonderful fic *Secrets From Dreams* gave me the idea that some kind of preparedness would be in order for someone with foreknowledge of the events. So, thanks for the inspiration! (Go read her stuff, it's great.)

The Throne Of the Gods Is Empty

Chapter Notes

4/24/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She flew through the air and landed against the base of the trebuchet with a blow that made her see stars. She'd known it was coming but still hadn't been ready for it when it happened. She definitely felt cracks under her armor, deep in her body. *Ribs*. Not to mention the wrench on her shoulder from where Corypheus had been holding her by the wrist. He was still talking, blathering, really. He hadn't even seemed to notice that all her interjections had been brief and sarcastic, he was so enamored of his own self righteous egotism. Only one line had stuck out to her, just as powerful in real life as it had been in the game.

“Beg that I succeed, for I have seen the throne of the gods, and it was empty.”

She was going to rip her sorta not really boyfriend a new asshole. In what fucked up version of events did he think letting Corypheus's Venatori find his orb was a good plan? Had he really miscalculated that much?

You know he did. He'd been asleep for a really long time. He didn't know what was happening in Tevinter. Corypheus was supposed to die trying to unlock it. Solas didn't know that it wouldn't happen. You've already had this conversation.

Focus, Carly. This is the moment.

“The Anchor is permanent,” Corypheus was saying, still stalking towards her. Right, it was almost time to finish this. “You have spoiled it with your stumbling. So be it. I will begin again. Find another way to give this world the nation and god it requires.”

She saw the sword laying in front of her and cocked her head at it. She wouldn't need it, had actually forgotten it was there. It was one of those moments that pulled her from her current reality back to the game. Why was it there? How did it end up being where it should be when events played out so differently than scripted? In the moment, it didn't matter. She began to ease her way towards the trebuchet release, an ache setting up inside her with each breath and motion. The behemoth that used to be a Magister was spouting again and she pretended to listen as she struggled for enough air for what she knew she must do.

“But you...I will not suffer even an unknowing rival. You must die.”

“Vint, you talk too much,” she panted out, getting just enough air into her punished lungs to kick the release and send the missile into the mountain. She'd told both Varric and Solas what she would do, and hoped they'd drawn Cullen's soldiers and the mages far enough away so that they could get clear. She knew she'd be fine.

Well, she hoped she would. This wasn't the game. And she felt like shit to boot.

The kick made her scream as agony ripped through her broken bones and reverberated through her

body. For a moment Corypheus looked shocked, and she wasn't sure if it was because she'd called him a Vint or if it was because she'd kicked the trebuchet, releasing the stone to fling far off into the night. She saw both Corypheus and the dragon look over the walls to the mountains. She heard the thunder of the snow begin and took a steadying breath. This would take good timing, a clear head and a lot of luck. She was already in enough pain that she didn't think she would manage even two of those three.

She ran, staggering, hearing the dragon shriek behind her. *Okay, it's lifting off with Corypheus. Count the steps...running out of space...LEAP!*

The wave of shattered wood and ice and torn trees hit her, propelling her forward, the avalanche gaining momentum still. Her cry of pain was lost in cacophony. She caught on the outer wall of the town and plummeted down, through a half burned floor and into the storage cellar being used as barracks. The roar of the snow never seemed to end, or maybe it was the roaring in her ears. Either way, she slumped to the ground and passed out for a while.

In the game, potions were a fairly good cure-all. In life, she found they were more like energy drinks with a bit of triage mixed in for flavor. She downed one as she got to her feet, feeling a rush of buzzing that was neither all that healing or energizing and wondered if she'd been closer to dead than alive after that fall. But it was enough to get her going again. She was still exhausted, she knew she had broken ribs and was probably bleeding internally from somewhere. Having to fight off the remains of the demon army by herself hadn't helped, although the adrenaline had pushed back the pain for a minute. Her brand new ability was a nice bonus as well, although her hand felt like it was going to drop off her wrist after using it. And to top it all off, she had no idea where the town had evacuated to. The snow from the avalanche had obscured their trail.

She heard a wolf's cry up ahead and stumbled in that direction, waiting until she saw him from the corner of her eyes before speaking. "Subtle, Solas."

"I do not actually control wolves, I hope you are aware," he said, falling in step with her just outside the brambles shaken loose from the avalanche. He looked hale and whole and she was relieved.

"Yeah, but can't you shapeshift?" she managed to get out impishly.

"Only in the Fade," he said, rather severely. "I no longer have the ability to change in my waking hours. My slumber took too much from me." He looked flustered and she smiled a little. It had undoubtedly been a *long* time since anyone knew that about him. He wrapped an arm around her to support her, seeing how she staggered. A pained whine escaped her and he stopped, turning to face her. "Are you hurt?"

"What do you think," she snapped. "I fell off a trebuchet at the front of a snowslide and into the barracks' basement." The cold air burned and the pain was getting worse. Like, frightening worse. She'd had enough near death experiences, thanks. On top of wrestling with a Blighted abomination that used to be a man face to face. "After first being *thrown at* the trebuchet. Fuck yes, I'm hurt."

"Hold still." She was perfectly happy to do so. She watched his hands glow in the snowy darkness.

"Have I told you yet that I'm glad you have healing magic?"

"Most Elvhen did."

“Still, it's a neat trick. Can't wait to see you take it the next level.”

“What?”

“It's an eye thing.”

“I am not going to ask what that means, because I have a feeling it is not something I am supposed to know just yet.”

“Spoilers,” she whispered in agreement, feeling the pain ease as the cool fingers of his magic slid against her broken bones, healing them. Her wrenched shoulder clicked into place with a painfully audible pop and she rotated it to get a feel for how sore it would be later. She'd have him deal with the Anchor once they were safe. “Funny to think I know more than you do right now.”

He straightened up from his healing and tipped her head back to assess her eyes. She allowed herself to get lost in the silvery blue of his while he checked her for concussion.

“You're awful cute sometimes,” she said dreamily, wondering what the hell was wrong with her. She didn't remember hitting her head, and that certainly wasn't something she'd say under normal circumstances. Well, okay, she might, given how things had shifted between them. But still, this was not exactly the time and place. Maybe she should have eaten more than just a sandwich before all of this. After all the times she got on his case about it...

“Only sometimes, lethallan?”

She gave him half a smile at his teasing tone. Okay, so maybe he was into flirting after disaster. “Yeah, the rest of the time you're just grim and fatalistic. Still hot, though.”

She felt woozy and started to fall sideways. Yeah, definitely should have eaten more, or slept more or...something. He caught her before she hit the ground, swung her into his arms at the knees and shoulders with surprising ease. Damn tiny Lavellan. She wasn't a waif. Not ever. She was supposed to carry the world, wasn't she?

“By whatever is sacred, you are a trial to me,” he muttered while he crunched through the snow.

“Nothing is sacred, Solas. Didn't you hear him? The throne of the gods is empty.” She let him cradle her, too weak and drowsy to fight the urge to be literally carried, just once. “You emptied it.”

His step faltered, but he started up again without speaking more than a whisper. She didn't quite hear it, but her ear caught the first bit. It sounded like a curse and she snorted softly. She was a bad influence on him. He trudged onward, heading away from Haven's ruins to a cave where warm torchlight was spilling out.

“I have her,” he called.

“Thank the Maker,” she heard Cassandra call back, and then there was a whole lot of confusion and chaos.

She was passed from hand to hand, like a child. The heat struck her, boiling off the cold and she felt sick to her stomach from the abruptness of it. Someone laid her down on a cot in a quiet spot, stripped her armor off her with brisk efficiency, covered her with a thick felted wool blanket. She had her eyes closed, so she didn't know who it was.

“Sleep,” he said in her ear. Of course. He wouldn't lose track of her in this crowded cave. He took

her hand in his, thumb rubbing absently across her skin. “Heal.”

“Solas...?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

“Da'banal.”

He let go of her hand and she felt his fingers trace the edges of her hair, along the sweep of the ears she still wasn't used to. He even traced her vallaslin. Idly she wondered what he thought of it, since he still had yet to make mention of it. He usually avoided even *looking* at it, so it was strange and nearly brought her back to wakefulness. But his fingers were too soothing, and she was too tired to fight with her eyelids.

Then she remembered and her eyes shot open, albeit grudgingly. “He tried to take the Anchor.”

“And he was unsuccessful.”

“Yeah, but...he changed it. Unlocked it. It's got a new power. Hurts like fuck.”

“Tell me.”

“It's like...an explosion.” She was losing the battle against sleep, and she wondered if there was more in his touch than just soothing. She flailed around until she could grab his sweater. He covered her hand with his own. “It's scary powerful, but it's going to be useful.”

“And it will accelerate the damage being done to you,” he whispered softly. She nodded with her eyes closed. “I shall remain aware of it. Now, sleep. I am not going anywhere.”

He didn't say anything more, only hummed a lullaby under his breath. He didn't stop touching her until she was asleep, her hand still holding his. She felt safe, if only for this moment, and she let her cares go knowing he was keeping watch over them.

Chapter End Notes

da'banal - literally 'small nothing', can be interpreted as 'you're welcome' or 'no big deal'. A word of my own creation, although later in the fic I will rely on the wonderful Project Elvhen for most Elvish translations.

The Heartbreak Place

Chapter Notes

4/28/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She knew what she would see as she crested the mountain trail. All that was missing was the swelling musical score to give the image more emotional weight. She scoffed lightly to herself. As if her life here could be dictated to by background music. She missed it though. She especially missed his theme. She would know much better where she stood with him with that backdrop in place to give her a hint.

She stood on the peak and looked across to where the keep nestled against the far side of the deep valley. The long winding road that would lead them there disappeared in the folds of rock, obscured further by mist rising as the sun shone down on it. There were Inquisition flags flying from the guard towers, and she could just make out scaffolding on the inner walls.

“Oh...” she breathed. He was watching for her reaction; she could see him in her periphery. She'd never dreamed it would look so huge in real life. Perspective in the game was often skewed, and distance hard to determine in the medium. But this place was larger than anything she'd seen. It was awe inspiring, and she wasn't even afraid to admit that. She managed to tear her gaze away and face his calm expression, the nascent hope in his eyes.

“Skyhold,” he said simply.

“You started working on it already?”

She'd caught him out; the tips of his ears went red. “Months ago.”

“When I told you we'd need it. Solas,” she teased, “you didn't even *like* me then. Why...?”

He stepped closer to her, nearly touching her all along her back, blocking the wind. If she breathed too deep, she'd lean into him. He planted his staff next to them, his hand tightening on it. She noticed little things like that with him. He kept up a polite mask in public that was often so hard to get through she'd given up trying. Better to look for other physical tells. He was *nervous* about her reception of this place that had meant so much to him through the ages. It was adorable.

“Fen'Harel is just a big sentimental fool, isn't he?” she murmured, knowing he could hear her even over the wind.

He turned his head, his chin just barely skimming the top of hers through her hair. “He has his moments.”

She did lean on him then, just slightly, just enough to feel his mage enhanced body heat penetrate her cloak. She dropped her hand back and it landed somewhere near his leg, but neither of them startled at it. Casual touch had become more commonplace between them, although it never went past his boundary of arbitrary propriety. For two fairly touch starved people, it was a miraculously big shift in trust that they could stand here like this. She reveled in it.

She tipped her head back into his chest and looked up at him. "It's wonderful, lethallin."

He huffed, his breath warming her ear. "It's barely begun is what it is."

"We'll get it sorted out soon enough. C'mon, enough enjoying the view. I imagine it's still a couple hours away and we have a lot of tired people."

She looked back down the trail and saw the sprawl of the folk who looked to her for leadership, her teeth clenched against the rising worry for them. They'd saved every civilian from Haven, and along the way, more and more showed up to join the Inquisition. The procession of all manner of people stretched back as far as she could see, flanked by Cullen's veterans on either side. As massive as it was, she hoped Skyhold was big enough to house all of them.

She was right, and it was midday before they crossed the narrow bridge leading to the wide open gate. It was silly, she knew, to be so excited to see it. She was already familiar with every nook and cranny of it. She grabbed his hand in her exuberance and squeezed it before dashing through the courtyard to actually touch the stones. He stood off to the side of the entry and watched her, a curious expression on his face. Did he know that she knew this was where he'd created the Veil? Had he guessed that she had been such a sucker for lore that she knew things that weren't even in the game proper? Probably not.

She placed her palms on the curtain wall of the stairs leading up to the main level and smiled. The rough cut stone was cold under her fingers, but so real. So solid. "I'm home," she breathed. "I'm really here."

"You truly have been looking forward to this, have you not?" he asked, walking over to her as the clatter of the oncoming horde began to fill the air. "Even then, when you'd first arrived in Haven. You told me the Inquisition would need a new home, but you would not let me name it. As if you were holding on to a secret."

"Yeah, that sums it up pretty well."

"Why?"

She glanced back at him, mouth open already to let out a quip and a joke about romance arcs and fanciful notions. And realized she couldn't say it, even with this closeness blossoming between them.

This was where they fell in love in every playthrough she'd ever done. Beautiful and heartbreaking. The mysteries and conversations and even fights, his temper when it was lost a volatile thing made more surprising because he so rarely let it out. The coziness of quiet times, the paint on the walls, the balcony where he would kiss her and tell her he loved her. The way he would sound like it was being wrenched from him against his will. Certainly against his better judgment. The loneliness she would feel once he was gone even knowing it was a game, the coldness that remained when her character's face was bare and her heart lay in shards. The way she'd still have to face him, work with him, harden her heart to a cutting edge around him by his own advice.

She couldn't say any of those things.

"Spoilers," she said instead and he cocked his head at her, his eyes distant and pained. It reminded her of a shot from his DLC that made her heart *ache* with sorrow for him. When he realized he should have just said something all along. That he should have trusted. That look on his face haunted her, had the power to make her cry. To make her forget it was fiction, it was a game.

But it's not now. He's looking at me now like he has something to confess and it hurts and that's a muddle of confusion because what could he possibly still have to hide?

She hoped he wasn't dipping, although he probably had at least a little to put that look on his face. Only it was she who wasn't saying what she felt, she wasn't trusting him. But she knew that just because she was trying to change his plans didn't mean this was a circumstance where all she needed were the right dialogue options to make him love her. He really and truly was an immortal mage god from another world and she wasn't even really Dalish and they both knew that, could never forget that. Just as she should not forget that what she was doing was actually pretty terrible of her if she didn't mean it.

But I do. Shit...I'm in love with him already.

Oh no.

She was so far gone, she couldn't even see the line she'd crossed to get there in her rearview. She didn't even know when it happened.

She pulled her hands away from the stones and tried not to see the intensity of his scrutiny when he looked at her. "I should see how the others are coming along. We have a lot of work to do."

"Carly..."

"Later, okay? Just...later."

He let her walk away and she could see him still standing there as the long train of people started to file into the courtyard. She turned away and went to find Cass, Cullen and Josephine. She already saw Leliana. The War Room awaited, as did all the other things she should be focused on rather than the blaze of realization choking her breath. Soon she'd be presented with the sword of the Inquisition, her title would change, more of her would be buried under fable. There were a million more side quests to sort out, and supplies to gather. Hawke would be coming. The tides would start turning.

But she couldn't shake the utterly swamped feeling of confusion. Couldn't even talk to anyone about it, because how lame was it that she had gotten snared in her own trap like an idiot. She had no one to blame but herself.

Fuck, I wasn't supposed to actually fall for him. Now what do I do?

Chapter End Notes

Slightly shorter chapter, yes. But I plan to upload a new snippet into the Cutting Room Floor today too, so that should make up for it.

Settling In With Wine and Spirits

Chapter Notes

5/1/20

Varric was bent over a ledger, a roaring fire at his side, casting him nearly in shadow. She stopped for a second to appreciate the wholly aesthetic pleasure she got from looking at him in the flesh. Snarky sidekick, dearly beloved friend, entirely too sexy dwarf. She didn't know how she would have gotten through these last few months without him.

"Paperwork, like real paperwork?" she teased, causing him to look up over his reading glasses, the lenses catching the firelight. Shit, he actually *did* wear them? "That's a battle no one escapes from clean."

"Just because I'm miles from home in the middle of an apocalypse doesn't mean I can slack, Peaches. What brings you?"

"Just wanted to see how you were settling in."

He leaned back and tossed the glasses on the open ledger to rub the bridge of his nose. She sat down next to him at the table, happy to have the fire warm her backside. There were still holes in the roof of the Great Hall, and it was drafty. "I'm doing all right, nice castle you got here. How about you? You've been...a bit off for a while."

"You mean since Redcliffe."

"Obviously you were successful there, since the mages were on hand for the Breach. Then we had the whole battle and fall of our former base of operations to deal with. All that aside, you haven't been yourself. What aren't you telling these fine folks?"

His whiskey colored eyes bored into hers and she had a hard time conjuring up a smile for him. Leave it to Varric to know how much she left out of things. "A lot. Don't know if I want to tell you either."

"What happened out there, Carly?"

"I changed the course of events. Nothing too major, just avoided some time travel."

"Shit."

"Yeah. It mostly went according to plan anyway. So that's good."

"Uh huh. What part of it didn't?"

"I got hurt pretty bad. Solas had to basically rebuild my leg. Did you know that elfroot potions don't do nearly as much good here as they do when it's a game?"

"Peaches..."

She smiled, more genuinely. "I'm all right, Varric. We all lived, that's what matters. And we lived long enough to make it here, which is even better."

"Speaking of Chuckles, what's going on there?"

"Nothing worth talking about."

"Don't bullshit a bullshitter." She just raised her eyebrows at him. "I see."

"No words of wisdom from my BFF?"

"BFF?"

"Best friend forever."

He snorted. "Nope, no words of wisdom. No judging either, if you're happy. I know this isn't what you wanted, being stuck here in a world that isn't yours. If you find something in it worth keeping, go after it."

"Those are *very* wise words, Varric." She tilted her head at him and they shared a smile between them. "Now, before I go, I know you've been writing to Bianca. About the red lyrium." She waited for his affronted sputtering to pass. "You done? Good. I can give you more details for your next letter, regarding Corypheus's minions and where she should be looking to put a stop to their mining."

It was quiet in the rotunda, for which she was grateful. She was was pleased with her decision to have Leliana settle into one of the empty guard towers for her rookery instead of here. Who thought having raucous birds inside an open air library was a good idea? Two words: bird shit. At any rate, now that wasn't a danger, and the acoustics weren't being constantly abused as well. Just one more thing to be proud of, she snorted to herself. She wasn't ready to face Solas just yet when she didn't have any barriers up against him dipping into her head but thankfully he wasn't there. She climbed the stairs and found Dorian lounging in a nook, an open bottle of wine next to him and a half empty glass in his hand.

"Inquisitor," he greeted. "Care to join me?"

"Absolutely." She settled across from him and looked him over. He met her regard with the typical level of charming equanimity she expected from him. "Settling in all right?"

"This is a remarkably fine library, aside from some drivel. I am appropriately shocked."

"To find it worthy of a pampered Tevinter mage?" she teased lightly.

"Come now, I am not so prejudiced as that. Still," he poured more wine and offered her a glass, which she accepted. "Still, one wonders how such a library came to be here in the middle of this ghastly nowhere."

"A mystery for sure," she replied, sipping. It was tart and partially dry, but not so much that it tasted like cardboard in her mouth. She liked it. And Dorian was looking at *her* with an appraising air.

"Somehow I don't think I believe that."

“Why not?”

“I have watched you roam around this half ruined castle like you own it. Which I suppose you do, after a fashion. You are very familiar with this place, aren't you, Inquisitor? And you are not the only one,” he added, casting his eyes in a gesture to the lower level.

“Perhaps,” she said into her glass.

“Fine, keep your secrets.”

“I will, thank you.” He snorted delicately. “So, are you still glad you came South?”

“I'll admit, the lack of backstabbing is an unusual feeling to get used to. I'm managing.”

“I'm sure you're getting the normal amounts of disparaging comments and snide looks, though, right?”

“Hardly. You Southerners can't even dredge up a good scowl. Ah, listen to me prattle. Tevinter has many faults, this is true, I will never deny it. But at least it's warm.”

“Okay, that's fair. You're getting along with everyone right?”

“Yes, even that spirit. You know I have quite a lot of experience with them, yes?”

“I know. Cole is...special.”

“Quite.”

“You should spend more time with him, get to know the true nature of them.”

He made a scoffing sound. “I *was* raised around them.”

“Yes, bound to service. Not the same thing. And don't let Solas catch wind of that flippant attitude. Binding strikes too close to slavery for him. You don't want him pissed off.”

“Charming phrase. Next you'll tell me I should get to know the brute you seem to trust so well.”

“Bull?” She laughed. “Eh, you'll figure him out yourself.”

“He's a Qunari spy, Inquisitor. Are you sure he's trustworthy?”

“I am. Very sure.” She handed him her empty glass and grinned as he refilled it. She already knew she would choose the Chargers over any harebrained deal with the Qunari. They might pay for it later, but there was no way she'd sacrifice Bull's trust once she had it. Nor would she sacrifice the Chargers. No way in hell.

“You are remarkably self assured for a Dalish.”

“I am that. Is that a problem?”

“Oh no, it's quite refreshing, really. To see the South forced to fall in line with a elven Inquisitor is delightful.”

“I'm glad you think so,” she gave him her best impish grin.

“My dear, you are a breath of fresh air in this otherwise dreary world. I look forward to many

adventures.”

“Me too.” They clinked their glasses together and drank until she heard the thump of books below. She jumped, just slightly, but Dorian narrowed his eyes at her.

“Trouble in paradise?”

“Hardly,” she managed. There was no paradise to have trouble in, after all.

“You look ready to flee.”

“It's...nothing. Pour more wine and tell me about Tevinter.”

She wove a little in place, but she wasn't so drunk that she couldn't slip from the rotunda without meeting So...anyone's disapproval. Thank the Maker for connecting ramparts from building to building. No one had to see her stumble inelegantly through the tavern either, since she came in through the top floor. She found her spirit child in a corner, keeping to himself.

“Hello, Cole.”

“Hullo.” He peered at her from under his hat. “Waiting, wanting, wondering. You do not belong, but yet you are here.”

“Just keep it to yourself, all right?” He bobbed his head in assent. “Are you settling in?”

“So much pain, I want to help.”

“I know you do. You're welcome to do so, Cole. Don't let the others make you feel that you aren't. I'm in charge.”

“Leading, lying, loving...oh!”

“Hey, I try not to lie too much. Keep the rest of that to yourself too, okay?”

“You know who he is, you're helping him too.” He sounded excited, a puppy with a secret treasure dug up from the ground. She felt an overwhelming urge to hug the spirit.

“I'm trying.”

“The wolf hunts alone no more.”

She smiled. “On his good days. Some of his hunts I can't reach.”

“Not yet. Soon, solace in the silent times.” He turned more fully to her, his pale eyes shining in the gloom of the tavern. “He hurts, an old pain, splinters in a mirror. He won't let me...”

“I know. He isn't ready. We both have to be patient.”

“It's *hard*,” the spirit said, emphatic and much like that same puppy forbidden a favorite toy.

“Yeah, it is. I hope he gets there, I really do. He has too much pride.”

“Pride goes before wisdom, he forgets his truth. You won't let him! You change everything.”

“No, I won't.” She let the last bit slide past her. She wouldn't believe it until she heard Solas say it.

She wondered what anyone else would make of this strange conversation. She'd never had trouble following Cole's often meandering logic in the game. Nor had she ever tried to make him something he wasn't. And not just because it was a way to get Solas's approval. Cole was a spirit, and that was how he should remain, in her opinion. Varric would just have to deal. Not that they were there yet.

“Binding, blinding, bloody,” Cole said suddenly.

“Not yet, sweetie. Not yet.”

“Compassion is a strong feeling, hard, harrowing, hopeful.”

She laughed. “I do my best.”

“I like it here. With all of you.”

“Good.” Fatigue began to settle into her, not to mention her head was pounding from too much wine. She'd have to remember to grab snacks the next time she binged with Dorian. “I'm gonna go, get some rest. You...stay out of trouble.”

“I want to help.”

“You can help, just don't get caught. All right?”

“They never see me,” he whispered. “They don't remember. I don't remember.”

She put her hand on his sleeve, feeling the shivers that ran through the body he wore as he figured out how it fit him. “I see you, Cole. I remember.”

It Goes Deep

Chapter Notes

5/5/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She was forced to admit it, she was avoiding Solas.

She stopped looking him in the eyes like a coward every time he passed her in a corridor or chamber. She would catch sight of him from above sometimes in the rotunda, and suddenly miss his wit and often dry observations like she would a limb. But she had no control over this newfound and unwelcome realization, and so, she kept her distance. She went back to working herself to the bone, falling into her ridiculously big, empty bed with barely enough energy to pull off her boots so she would not dream.

She'd wake in the morning and see the sachet on the bedside table – she'd forgotten it was in her shirt and it got bloody during the attack on Haven, but she couldn't bear to get rid of it – and she'd remember walking in the Fade with him with a pang of something lost. She'd dress for the day, put up her hair and remember the sketch he'd done of her with it down. And she'd miss him all over again, while simultaneously wanting to hide in a hole until it went away.

She didn't want to say she was afraid, but there wasn't much of any other excuse that fit. She couldn't pin down whether it was fear of him dipping into her head to know what she was thinking or if it was the fear itself of *what* she was thinking. Or if she was chastising herself because she felt like she had been manipulating him, regardless of the fact that he did it to everyone else. Now she couldn't even hide behind an excuse that she was doing it for the greater good or some bullshit like that. When it came down to it, she had fallen for him just like she should have known she would, because he was *Solas*. He was every bit as much of the soft spoken Fade nerd she'd fallen for in every Dalish playthrough. Ugh, she was pathetic. And she really shouldn't have been surprised. So any way she sliced it, she was avoiding him.

She spent time with Dorian instead, and Cole, and Sera with her too scathing views on elves. They had good times together, usually. The castle was full of noise, full of work. She ran hither and yon to meet this deadline, squash this attack by Red Templars, seal this rift, find these missing soldiers, always with a new rotation of companions so it didn't look like she was playing any favorites.

She upgraded the castle gardens, choosing herbs over the pleasant but ultimately useless Chantry flowers, then balanced it out with a training yard instead of infirmary. She was on hand the day Dagna arrived and got her settled in the Undercroft where the dwarf was thrilled to see so many tools and resources at hand. Dagna's enthusiasm was infectious and Carly worked on experimenting with armor styles and new weapons for everyone, handing them out as extremely belated Satinalia gifts.

And she avoided Solas.

Who definitely noticed.

“Carly,” he called as she dashed across the rotunda, taking a shortcut across the keep after talking

with Cullen so she didn't get too soaked by the sleet falling outside. She stopped short and met his gaze. He was leaning over his worktable, a shard gleaming on the edge of it, humming its quiet song. "Are you all right?"

"I'm...fine."

He made a face. "I doubt that highly."

"Really, I'm okay. Just working through some shit."

He raised an eyebrow at her, but didn't straighten up from the pile of papers he was leafing through. From where she stood they looked like more mural sketches. "I am here if you need to talk."

"I know."

"Ah, I see. That is the problem."

His gaze was guileless now, but she could tell he'd dipped that day they arrived, and he hadn't forgotten what he'd heard in her head. There were times she hated being laid so bare to him, but then there were times when she had to admit it was easier than having to explain. He contemplated his hands, the walls, the shard...then his eyes met hers again.

He looked worn out. He'd been injured rather badly not too long back, and for all his professed constitution and strength as an Elvhen, he'd taken a beating – not to mention some significant blood loss – and she'd left him behind for several forays now while he recovered. It appeared he hadn't been taking time off as she'd wanted him to. She wondered if he roamed these halls like she did when the castle was silent.

"Is it hard, being back here?" she asked before she could censor it. She even went to the table, the better to keep the conversation private from all the ears above. The second story crawled with researchers and their assistants and others just partaking of the atmospheric library. It was midday, and the weather was foul. Anyone who could find distraction indoors was doing so.

"On some levels, yes. On others..." He looked around again, and she thought perhaps he was seeing something else entirely. "This is not the place I knew."

"This keep is Fereldan, right? Built on top of the ruins of Tarasyl'an Telas?"

His eyes sharpened for a moment before he relaxed again. "Yes."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Certainly."

"How is it that this place, situated on top of a mountain in the middle of a very tall, icy mountain range, escapes most of the horrible weather?" He gave her a look that spoke quite plainly that *that* was not what he'd expected. "I mean, the garden is blooming. And all the trees have leaves even though it's the middle of winter. And sure, it's sleeting today, but I can see perfectly well from my balcony that it's snowing outside the boundary of these walls. Is it magic?"

"Of a very old sort, yes." He finally stood up from his papers, crossing his arms in a thoughtful pose. "The power here goes deep into the bedrock of this place. It predates the Veil, as you no doubt have guessed. It's a wonder no one else has thought to ask about it."

“Well, I know a bit more about this place than most.”

“That is putting it mildly, I think.”

“Besides, I'm the only one who knows it was yours. No one else knows *who* they should be asking.” He quirked his lips, trying to keep a smile hidden. “Does it bother you that we're all here? Humans and dwarves and...well, ya know, me. In this spot that's so important to you.”

“I would not have offered if I felt bothered.”

“Solas,” she said with a sigh. “You didn't offer, I kinda bullied you into it.”

“So you did. However, if Haven had fallen without me knowing it was coming...we would still be here.”

“Would we?”

He paced the length of the table and back before coming close to take one of her hands in his. Almost like he'd been fighting with himself before saying the hell with it. Their fingers slid together as if made for each other and she fought back the urge to just close her eyes and revel in his touch after so long without it. It was silly and she felt herself flush at the thought.

“As you often remind me, I need the Inquisition.” He lifted her hand and traced where the Anchor lay under her glove. “I need you. I would not have left this organization homeless and powerless. That would accomplish little.”

“That's nice of you.” Dammit, now she sounded breathless like a girl with a crush. She pulled her hand out of his and attempted to rein herself in.

He was giving her his best resting wolf face – as if he knew how it both discomfited and amused her – and shook his head. “Nice does not enter into it. It was strategic.”

“Pfft,” she scoffed without thinking. “It's not a game.”

“That does not preclude the opportunity to treat it as such.”

Wait...where they still talking about moving to Skyhold, or was he holding half a conversation with her racing brain? That just made her warm all over, and his eyes gleamed as he took it in. She scowled at him.

“Stop that,” she snapped. He laughed, tucking a stray lock of her hair behind her ear. “Argh.”

“May I just point out that it is good to see you so, relatively speaking, uncomfortable?”

“Why?”

“You carry such burdens with indomitable strength. You have such confidence now in yourself, your abilities, the team you have assembled around you. And yet, to see you so unsure in this. It is relieving to see that you have a side, however well hidden, that is none of those things. Despite how much you know, you are not perfect.”

She made a face at him, equal parts rueful and disparaging. “Doesn't make it any easier when you can read me like one of your books.”

“Ah, but that is the best part. I cannot. You are better at keeping me out than you think you are.”

“Well that's good to know.”

“I respect your reservations.”

“I have good reasons for them, and so do you. Don't think I don't know it.”

“This is true.”

“I don't want to put any pressure on you, or myself for that matter. I have enough on my plate. Your friendship is important to me, Solas. I would never want to mess that up.”

“As yours is to me. You are a mystery, a unique one. And admittedly, a distraction.” He put a little distance between them. “But I do not wish you to feel that you must hide, or avoid.”

“All right,” she said, a little uncertain of what exactly he was saying. It suddenly felt backwards. Wasn't *she* supposed to be the one to give *him* time to sort it through? “I'll work on it.”

“Now I have kept you from your duties long enough. Where are you headed?”

“I have some judgments to do. I'm sure you've heard about the goats against the walls?”

“I have.”

“Yeah. That Avvar chieftain is...uh...making a statement. Now I have to figure out what to do with him.”

“And have you decided?”

“I think I'm going to let him go off and harass the Tevinter border if he wants to be all bloodthirsty and vengeful. Gets him out of my hair and keeps the border on its toes.”

“An equitable solution. I shall let you get back to it.”

“Solas?” He turned back to her, eyebrow raised in question. “Thanks for...ya know...not being weird about it.”

He smiled. “Anytime, lethallan.”

Chapter End Notes

The reference to a sketch with her hair down can be found here:
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/23789257/chapters/57344596>

Also, I can't be the only who noticed the weird weather thing with Skyhold, right? I know there's not really a calendar that marks how long you've been playing in-game, but still...it's a castle on a mountain peak. There shouldn't be a garden. Or leaves on any trees...or trees for that matter. Just a little thing I noticed while falling off a roof into said trees. Let me know what you think, feedback is always the lifeblood.

All Too Real

Chapter Notes

5/8/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Solas made a face into his teacup and Carly stopped short as she entered the rotunda, covering her mouth with her hand before the sound she made escaped. No. She wasn't ready for this. He scowled into the cup, swallowing hard and then noticed her there.

“Carly?”

“You hate tea,” she whispered through her fingers. Even so softly spoken the words fell like stones from her mouth. She gave him a helpless stare, feeling like she'd rather be buried by those stones than face what was coming. “I thought we'd have more time.”

“You already know.” It wasn't a question. She nodded. For a second his eyes darkened with anger. She waited for him to accuse, to ask why if she'd known it was coming, why this couldn't have been prevented too. She must have flinched while she waited for the inevitable. His anger bled away as he followed the line of her thoughts.

“I'm sorry,” she said. “It's not a reliable part of the timeline. I didn't know when it would be. I'm so sorry. If there was *anything* I wish I could rewrite...”

“We cannot save her, can we?” he asked, with so much pain under the words that were trying to be acceptance. He deserved honesty. No matter how brutal.

“Not as she is, no.” Tears welled in her eyes, futile ones that she wiped away without speaking. The click of the teacup on the table was a welcome distraction. He got up and began to brush past her.

“I will prepare.”

“I...yeah, me too. I'll meet you at the stables as soon as you're ready.”

She tapped Varric and Cole to come along, knowing the pillars wouldn't be too hard with just a handful of rogues. Between them they had enough skills to get back to Skyhold without Solas afterwards. In fact, they could get some of the Dalish stuff done while they were there, and still have a safe place to camp. Besides, she trusted the two of them enough to not attack Wisdom when she was still in her demonic form.

“All new...” Cole said, following her to the stables as they prepared to ride out. “But not for you. This hurts you. As much as it is hurting him. Why?”

“Yes, Cole, it hurts. I can't change it, or fix it. All I can do now is let it play out.”

“Do I want to know?” Varric asked.

“Wisdom is Solas's friend. She's a spirit, pulled through and bound. Circle mages. They signed their own death warrant with this. And I failed to change any of it.”

Varric said nothing in reply. Solas approached, his face carefully blank but Carly could sense the underlying fury he held in check. The ride would be hard and long, and she chose their hardest mounts for the journey.

The Exalted Plains were miserable enough to begin with, in her opinion, without this on top of it. They rode straight through the burning ruins. They ignored the fighting to the side of the road, she didn't even stop to gather herbs the way she normally would. She wanted to get this over and done, to let Solas take the time he needed before returning to Skyhold.

The roar of the demon drew them up before they even saw the mages, a cry both angry and pained. Carly steeled herself for what they would find.

"We can still release her," she said aloud as they dismounted. She wasn't sure if she was reassuring herself or him. Solas took her arm, stopping her from approaching the mages to talk.

"Thank you, lethallan."

"Don't thank me for this, Solas. I should have..."

"Stop. You cannot predict everything."

"*This* I should have. I knew it was coming. Of all the things I could change, I'd truly hoped this was one of them. Ir abelas."

"You have gotten us here in time. You have accepted this portion of my life without prejudice, and indeed, with a great deal of compassion I did not look for. You have been a true friend in this, as in all things."

"And it still wasn't enough."

He laid his hand on her cheek, forcing her to look at him. "It is."

"Thank the Maker you're here," the mages interrupted them.

Solas's expression turned icy cold and smooth, the calm before the storm. It didn't matter that it wasn't directed at her, she felt it in her marrow. She let Solas confront the mages, not stepping in until the complete idiot tried to explain to a Fade mage what a demon was. As he tried to justify his actions.

"Listen, dumbass, we aren't here for *you*," she snapped before Solas could. "Stop trying to explain something – badly, I might add – to someone who has more knowledge about demons and spirits in his little finger than you have in your whole Circle. Cole, Varric, let's do what we have to do to release her."

They'd already worked out the plan as they traveled. The three of them took on the pillars while Solas distracted Wisdom's wrath. Carly ignored the jabs and taunts of the corrupted spirit as she worked. She took a hard lash across her back, forgetting in the moment that pride demons made whips. It knocked the wind out of her, but still she forged on and focused on the pillars until they tumbled into chunks and dust.

The mage sputtered at her when they were done and Solas was calming his friend, but Carly stared him down. "Don't even think it. You don't have even have the *faintest* idea of what you've done."

She saw the flash of Solas's magic and Wisdom collapsed to the ground, broken and vulnerable. Dying. Carly scowled fiercely at the mage and walked over to where Solas was talking with

Wisdom. It was awful to see her so ragged, like she was bleeding. She couldn't follow the Elvish, but she remembered the gist of how this conversation went. She knew when Wisdom asked him to release her and she bit her cheek hard enough to bleed, tears pricking her eyes.

He bent his head. "Ma nuvenin."

She didn't want to watch, but she owed him this much. She needed to see it, to understand fully what it meant to him. This wasn't a cut scene from a game, it was an intelligent being's life being ended. And when it came down to it, it was her fault. She could have said something to him at any time once they reached Skyhold instead of trying to avoid running into him because of her own conflicted feelings. The spirit dissipated into the air, gently and with a feeling of peace. She swallowed her sobs, let the tears flow freely down her face.

He stood and faced her, came up to her and wiped her cheeks with gentle fingers. She could feel the rage he held barely harnessed. He was nearly shaking with it. His gaze slipped over her shoulder to where the mages stood loosely together, waiting to talk. The Wolf had arrived, with a singular focus for his vengeance. It was not at her.

"Tel'abelas," Solas said very quietly, holding on to calm in a manner she hadn't thought possible. She could hear the emphasis he was putting on the words. *I am not sorry for what I'm about to do.* Carly cupped his face before he could leave her side. His jaw was clenched so tight that his skin felt hard under her fingers.

"I know. Do it. I'm not going to stop you." She stood on tiptoe and just barely brushed his cheek with her lips, then let him go and kept her back turned. There was a sound like the crackle of electricity followed by wet splats and Varric shouted in horrified disgust. Cole was silent. So was she. She didn't look. The wind shifted and she could smell the burning flesh and she choked back her gag reflex.

She had packed an extra bag of supplies for him, and silently added it to his mount. His eyes met hers for a moment as he got into the saddle. "Carly..."

"You don't need to say it. Go on, I'll see you when you get back. I packed you extra food."

"Thank you."

He rode away from them, disappearing into the rolling hills before long. She turned back to Varric and Cole and they left the scene, just another pile of burning corpses where once there were men.

He was gone for two further days after her arrival back at the castle. Even knowing that he would eventually return, she was worried. When she finally heard the guards calling out his approach, she raced down the steps to meet him in the courtyard. He was subdued and quiet, but his face brightened to see her there. She held out her hand and he took it.

"Come with me," she said, leading him into the keep and up to the stairwell to her chamber. She knew they wouldn't be disturbed there. She sat down on the top stair, tugging him down with her so he landed on the step below.

"I found a quiet place..." he started, but then seemed to lose all momentum.

"And went to sleep," she picked up for him. "You visited the place where Wisdom resided, but it was empty." His face turned up to hers, such a reversal from their usual stance that she smiled sadly, tracing the fine smattering of freckles on his cheekbones that she was never in a position to

see so closely. “Stirrings of energy remained, and someday, if the conditions are right, something new will live there. Solas, I am *so* sorry.”

She was utterly shocked when his arms went around her and he buried his face against her. She held him close, laying her cheek on top of his head, ignoring the twisting angle she was in. He wasn't weeping, but his breathing was harsh and his hands on her back were gripping her shirt so tight she thought it might rip.

“On Earth,” she said softly, “there are several religions that believe that no soul is ever truly gone. That we exist in a cycle of lives, over and over. It's called reincarnation. We have no memory of the past, other than wisps and dreams. And no Fade to revisit them. But we learn from each cycle until we reach a state of higher being. And we transcend the boundaries of physical existence to a place of peace. Solas, I know that even if the spirit returns, it won't be the one you knew. And I'm so sorry for that. How are you doing?”

“It hurts, it always does. Now I must endure.”

“I wish I could do more to help.”

“You have helped,” he said, lifting his head. “You do not know how much you have helped.”

She kissed his forehead and let him decide if he was ready to let her go. His arms stayed around her, shifting her so they sat side by side, leaning comfortably on each other. “I have a fair idea. Just remember you don't have to grieve alone. It's easier to carry when it's shared.”

He smiled at her then, something wistful and fleeting in his eyes that warmed to something steadier. “And you have shared it with me. It's been so long since I had someone I could trust. Ma serannas.”

“Da'banal.”

Chapter End Notes

Hugs and tissues are available upon request, if needed.

On another note, I debated long and hard about pronouns for this chapter (and probably overthought it way too much). I know Solas calls spirits 'it', but that just bothers me. Wisdom presents as female, but I never assume. But then I got the companion banter between Solas and Cole regarding Wisdom...and they both use 'her'. So...

Champion At Rest

Chapter Notes

5/12/20

Guess who's here?

The Inner Circle meeting was dragging on and on and Carly just wanted to scream that she already knew what Corypheus was going to do, she already knew where they needed to be prepared most. Come hell or high water, she wasn't going to lose anyone in the Fade. Shit, if she had her way, no one would be *entering* the Fade at all.

C'mon, Varric, you promised me she'd be here.

The door to the War Room finally opened and he strolled in, smug as only he could be. "I know someone who can help with all this." She nearly jumped for joy, but contained it, sharing a secret smile with the dwarf. "Everyone being so inspirational jogged my memory and I sent a message to an old friend. She's crossed paths with Corypheus before, and may know more about what he's up to. She can help."

Carly bit her lip to keep from laughing and turned to the others. "We can't afford to turn away more allies. I want you all to remember this."

"Somehow I get the feeling this surprise friend is not news to you, Inquisitor," Leliana said.

"In a manner of speaking. Now, if you will all excuse us, I'm sure Varric's friend is not overly eager to pawed at by a roomful of strangers." She followed him out and up the stairs to the battlements. "What did you tell her, Varric?"

"About you, Peaches? Eh..."

"Did you or didn't you?"

"I...might have."

He looked like he expected her to be angry and she gave him a reassuring grin. "It's all good. The more she knows, the better I can plan. I'm not letting anyone else die for me on this stupid quest."

"Die?!"

"Not on my watch," she promised him, vehement. "It's not gonna happen."

"Ya know, Peaches, you're a bit scary when you get like this."

She took a breath and calmed herself down. "Sorry."

"Huh," he grunted and led the way onto the battlements. Hawke was standing at the wall, looking out into the mountain range. She was taller than Carly expected, or maybe that was just because she was now so short. A pair of wicked daggers crossed her back in shoulder holsters. Varric made

introductions in a crisp, formal tone underlaid with a good deal of humor. “Lady Inquisitor Carly Lavellan, Marian Hawke, the Champion of Kirkwall.”

“She doesn't go by that anymore, dummy.” She gave him a thump in the shoulder.

Hawke turned and gave Carly a good once over. Her face had fine lines in it now, and the red streak across her nose made her look overly pale. Wherever she'd been keeping herself didn't get enough sun. But her eyes really did blaze like sapphires in the light.

“Varric's told me some interesting tales about you, Inquisitor. And the world paints you as larger than life. But look at you, you're just a tiny thing.”

“Fucking Dalish body models,” she muttered and Hawke laughed.

“You really aren't from here, are you?” she wondered in awe. Carly shook her head. “Amazing, and I thought I'd seen everything there was to see in Thedas. So...do you even need me to tell you anything?”

“Not really. I've done this enough from my own world to know what to expect from him. Still, having your blades here won't be a bad thing. And honestly? I just wanted to have you here. For Varric, ya know?”

Hawke gave a very small, very telling smile. *Bingo. Knew it.*

“Besides,” Carly continued, “I'll still need your help getting to...whoever the Warden contact is.”

“Stroud.”

“Ah, good man. Always liked him.”

“It's uncanny, the things you already know,” Hawke said.

“I suppose it must be from where you guys are standing. For me, this is now a race for a whole lot of tinkering with the order of things. You, Varric and Solas are the only ones who know the truth. Okay, and Cole. Leliana suspects I'm not what I seem, but I think she thinks it's because I really *am* the Herald of Andraste, touched by the gods and full of knowledge I shouldn't have.”

“You should probably play into that, if you're planning to break the natural order of what comes next,” Hawke said.

“Yeah, I know. I just need to make it believable.”

“I'll put my considerable talents on that,” Varric said.

“Please do. I'm gonna need all the help I can get. In the meantime, I know Hawke needs to lay low until after Cass yells at you. Don't worry, I'll be lurking right outside the door and I'll interrupt that shit fast.”

He chuckled. “I can handle the Seeker.” Then he stared blankly at the two women giving him identical disbelieving faces. “Wow. I'm suddenly not too sure introducing you to each other was a great idea.”

“No, it was a fantastic idea.” She grinned at him and he gave her an exasperated scowl. “Hawke, I highly recommend the Herald's Rest. Get to know Bull and his Chargers. They're a lot of fun. Don't hold him being Qunari against him. Varric and I will meet you down there after we deal with

Cass.”

“Sounds like a plan.” She strode off the battlements after ruffling Varric's hair affectionately. He threw a disgruntled look at her back, but it was way too fond to be genuine. Carly decided to poke and get some clarification on her suspicions.

“Varric, tell me something.”

“Hmm?” he replied absently, still staring at Hawke's retreating figure. He didn't even fix his mussed hair.

“When was the last time you tapped that ass you can't tear your eyes from?”

“What?!” He shot her a look filled with hastily suppressed guilt and she laughed, leaning forward into his face. He flushed a dark red under his tan.

“My friend, I know you have a gilded tongue, but don't lie to *me*. I've been her, remember? I know precisely how she looks at you, and just got a front row seat to how you look at her when she isn't paying attention. So, got anything to share?”

“That's incredibly creepy, Peaches.”

“But accurate, I'm presuming, given that charming blush.”

“No one knows. Not even Rivaini. Shit, I don't even know if she told Bethany.”

“Varric, if the real Bethany is half as sharp as she was in my game...Hawke didn't have to tell her a single thing. And I'm sure Bela figured it out. Talk about sharp.”

He grunted and looked worried. “Is it that obvious?”

“To me, yes. But that's only because you're my best friend in *two* worlds, and I've walked her shoes. People who are intimate give off a different vibe. Why are you keeping it such a secret, anyhow?”

“The Carta and the Assembly would try to assassinate her. They've done that sort of thing before.”

“Varric, seriously? You really think there's anyone out there who could possibly catch *the* Marian Hawke, the Champion of Kirkwall, in a compromising position where she couldn't defend herself? Besides, she isn't Bianca.” He stiffened. “You've gotten yourself in a pattern of protecting your lady friends, and while that isn't totally a bad thing, I think the world ending is enough of an occasion to flaunt your own happiness for a change, and anyone who disagrees can fuck all the way off. And on top of all of that, Varric Tethras, you do not have to carry the world on your shoulders. You didn't have to do it then, and you don't have to do it now.”

He scowled. “No one else is doing it.”

“Oh, my friend, I love you so much I want to punch you. The burden is easier if you share it. Even weight distribution and all that. You think I'm carrying this weight alone? I told you the truth of who I was just about the moment we met, remember? Stop beating yourself up for things in the past that you can't change. Tell the world that you love Hawke. Fuck, I hope to whatever gods are listening that you've at least told *her*.”

“I have,” he snapped, all prickly now that she'd called him out. Then he gave her a shrewd glance. “Speaking of sharing the burden, what about you and Chuckles?”

“What about us?”

“How's that going?”

“None of your business, storyteller.”

“Aw, c'mon, I brought Marian here at great danger to herself. You owe me something for that.”

She put her hand back on his shoulder. “Varric, I'm going to meddle with events for you. You're paid in full.”

She watched the full implication of her words sink into him, watched his face turn ashen before returning to its natural tanned state. “What was going to happen?”

“You absolutely sure you want to know this? I don't know if I should tell you.”

“Yeah. Tell me.”

She sighed, resigned. “The Fade was gonna happen. I'm going to do everything I can to keep it from happening this time.”

“What do you mean?”

“We would have fallen through a rift into the raw Fade itself. Most of us would have gotten out. But either Hawke or Stroud would have stayed behind to secure our escape.” She shook her head emphatically. “It's not gonna happen while I have strength in my body.” She squeezed his shoulder under her hand, made him look at her again as his eyes started to glaze over. “You hear me? Not. Happening.”

“Shit.”

“Yeah...shit.” She steered him back towards the keep. “Let's get this over with. I want to get down to the Rest and get to know her better. And see how many times I can make you squirm with dirty stories about you two.”

“I am *really* not sure if this was a good idea anymore.”

“Oh, please. You love it and you know it. Just duck when Cass takes a swing at you. I don't want the evening ruined by you having your nose broken more than it already is.”

“Marian's right, that's uncanny. And creepy.”

Inciting the Chase

Chapter Notes

5/15/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly meandered back up to the keep after far too many pints with Hawke, Varric and the Chargers. Bull had retired early, leading her to suspect he had Tevinter company, which just tickled her pink. She wondered if Cassandra was still fuming at her, and decided she didn't much care. There was no way she wasn't stepping into the brewing shitstorm that had been forming between the Seeker and Varric.

"He lied to me!" Cass shouted. "The snake."

"I was protecting my friend!" he shouted back.

"Enough."

"You're taking his side of this?"

"Yeah, I am. You wanna know why? Cuz nothing anyone could have done at the Conclave would have changed things. Even I nearly ended up dead. Hawke has done her time as a hero. Leave her alone."

She didn't feel quite up to facing the long flights of stairs to her lonely chamber and detoured to the rotunda instead. A peek up to the second floor showed the light Dorian usually had burning there was out. She snickered to herself.

When she looked back down to ground level, she saw Solas painting. A single lantern glowed on his worktable, throwing his shadow onto the wall in harsh relief. He stretched his arm up to reach a spot nearly too high for him and she noticed he wasn't wearing his usual sweater. In fact, he didn't appear to be wearing a shirt at all.

Her mouth went distinctly dry and she held very still in the gloom outside the pool of lantern light. She watched the play of his muscles under his skin, the angles of his scapulae, the hints of spine and ribs. He was by no means as scrawny as he presented himself. Oh no, that was the hard, lean body of a long distance runner.

A wolf...

He moved with preternatural fluidity and precision as he worked on the wall, the sweep of palette, brush and even his fingers a quiet scrape in the otherwise silent library. Carly crouched down, hiding herself more thoroughly in the dark and slipped sideways towards the nearest obstacle that would hide her as silently as she could. She'd gotten much better at this whole stealth thing and was nearly hidden before she misplaced her foot and scuffed it on the floor.

He paused and turned his head just enough for her to see the light reflect in one eye, then he went back to work as if nothing had disturbed him. She sort of forgot about sneaking then and watched unabashedly as he swiped a final set of colors across the plaster, then set down his paint on the

table and wiped his hands clean. His biceps and forearms bunched and shifted as he worked the rag between his fingers. Next he swished brushes to detach the color on them, the gentle sound of clinking on glass and the liquid sloshing barely reaching her ears. His face was calm and relaxed the way she almost never saw it unless they were alone. She realized she'd missed that look of serenity, and promptly disregarded and tossed away all the reasons why she was avoiding him.

There were two tattoos rising off his chest and spreading up to his shoulders, one on each side. From her vantage point they looked like stylized claws at the ends of heavily outlined legs. The ink was stark and black against his pale skin. There was a broad scar across his rib cage, old and nearly invisible but for the way the lantern's angle caught it. It was the kind of wound that would have killed a lesser man.

It started with a war...

He looked up and for a second she froze, didn't dare to even breathe. But he wasn't facing her direction and gave no sign that he'd seen her. He gazed into the gloom for a minute, then went back to his clean up. She relaxed only by degrees, still feeling very much like a cornered rabbit. He stepped out of her line of sight, obscured by the bookcase she'd managed to hide near. She didn't even remember how there came to be one on this level, but wasn't concerned with it at the moment. She knew he had a storage container of pigments, plaster mixes and base oils there. She shuffled her feet out from under her and carefully thumped back on her ass, finally able to stretch out her legs. She leaned back on her arms and waited for him to come back to the lantern light to watch him paint more.

"Carly."

"Jesus fuck!" she screeched and jumped to her feet, heart in her throat. He was behind her, his bare feet so silent on the floor she'd never even heard him sneak around the bookcase. His eyes glittered in the shadows, giving him a far more otherworldly look than he usually had. There was no mistaking Solas for anything but an ancient elf. Too tall, too angular, too...intense. It was hard to tell what kind of mood he was in, he was so still. He'd tossed a shirt over himself but hadn't buttoned it and she could make out the lines of his ribs and the slightly darker shadow where his navel was in the gap. The ugly patched half trousers he wore didn't seem so horrible now that they were the only thing keeping him decent. That, and they hung so far down his hips she could see the jutting bones over the top of the waistband.

"What are you doing here?"

"I was watching you paint," she said, with all the blithe honesty of her semi-drunken state. She *had* been watching him paint, after all. That just wasn't all she was watching. He used this trick, he should appreciate the irony of it having it turned on him.

He took a single step towards her, barely moving into what little light the lantern cast this far. She was suddenly feeling hunted and the urge to run was strong. But she was getting tired of this cat and mouse. She was tired of avoiding it, she missed him. The open shirt shifted on him and she caught a glimpse of black ink on white skin. Her fingers positively itched to touch it and she made a fist.

"You are out and about fairly late," he said, his voice low and rumbling. A shiver ran down her spine.

"I was down at the Rest. Hawke is finally here." He took another step closer, slow and predatory. No malice, just pursuit. Now she felt the urge to giggle, felt her stomach lift and fill with butterflies. "I didn't feel like climbing all those stairs to my room. Came here instead."

“Fascinating.”

“I’ve never seen it dominated. I imagine the sight would be...fascinating.”

She swayed on her feet. It was too close in the space between them now. Too warm. She could feel her throat bob as she swallowed. Her drunken boldness shriveled and died a silent death. “I should...let you get back to your...um...”

His head tilted, just a few degrees. She shuddered to a stop, her breath caught short. She'd never felt anything as primal as the gaze he swept her with. This was neither lighthearted teasing nor casual flirtation. This was the kind of visceral emotional response that could tear her to shreds if she let it.

This is the younger, angrier Fen'Harel and all that implies, she thought. *And I want it.* Then he blinked and the spell was broken and he was just Solas again. He stepped all the way out of the deep shadows, close enough to touch. *Reckless, Carly, when you know he can hear you.* But she didn't budge.

“You really don't want to scurry, do you?” She could see the edges of his scar now, the skin slightly pink and stretched tight. It almost looked cauterized. She shook her head. “What *do* you want, Carly?”

I want all of it, all of you, she let slip in her head, even as she shook her head again, trying to deny it. She couldn't say that out loud, no. Never. He took in a sharp breath and she knew he'd caught it.

“Are you sure about that?”

That sounded...inviting. She didn't dare move a muscle.

“Be certain. For there will be no going back.”

I don't want to go back, she cried in her head. *I don't ever want to go back.*

And she realized she wasn't just thinking about the inevitable end of this chase. She didn't ever want to leave Thedas if it would mean leaving him. He seemed to realize that too and whatever tightly spooled tension was between them released so fast she nearly fell over.

He stepped into her personal space, crowding her and making her aware of every nerve in her body. He leaned down and pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead before backing away. “Go up to sleep, Carly. I will see you there.”

Chapter End Notes

So...I didn't realize this chapter was so short. Still, I felt challenged by my beta to make it as steamy as possible without them ever touching. I think I succeeded (plus I got out some headcannons on how Solas is built under his hobo outfit). Thoughts?

In the Chantry's Shadow

Chapter Notes

5/19/20

Did someone order Fade Tongue?

She was so pent up she wasn't sure she'd sleep. But as soon as her head hit her pillow, she was gone, drifting through fog until it resolved into her memory of Haven, with the Milky Way shining down on her. She tipped her head back to look at the stars, seeing others she knew as barely formed spirits flitted around her. There were more here now, pressing against the Veil, drawn back by the Breach being closed. She waited for him, butterflies swirling madly in her stomach like she was on her first date. She felt hands on her hips and closed her eyes, fitting herself to his shape as he materialized behind her. The hands on her hips slid across her stomach to lace together, his arms bracketing her. His chin rested on her shoulder and she huffed through her nose.

"You're too tall for that to be at all comfortable."

"Perhaps. It is worth the discomfort, however."

"Smooth," she whispered, and leaned back on him.

"Why here?"

"It's familiar," she said, a laugh in her voice. "And I figured seeing the past history of Skyhold can wait for later." She turned her head so her ear was pressed against his chest and listened to the sound of his heartbeat. It was slow and steady, a constant drum. She realized her skin was on his and that he hadn't changed his dream self from the waking one she'd just left.

Before she lost her nerve, she turned in the circle of his arms and pushed the shirt off his chest, letting her see the tattoo up close. There were subtle patterns in the lines that from far away had seemed solid, but only inches away were drawn to look like fur. She pressed her lips to his skin, so softly she tickled herself. And he *shuddered* around her. His hand snaked up through her hair to cup the back of her head and tugged gently, pulling her back until she met his eyes.

"Is this what you want," he whispered. *Informed consent*. She knew it mattered to him, as it mattered to her. She smiled, returning his whisper for one of her own, a breathy affirmative.

He kissed her.

She was anticipating something chaste and maybe off center. Like the game. After the fact she didn't know why she thought he would do something so tame. The reality was an assault of overwhelming proportions, shattering her weak expectations into dust. His teeth grazed her bottom lip, his tongue pressed against hers until she couldn't breathe. She moaned in the back of her throat and wrapped her arms around his neck, clinging to him, molding herself to him. His free hand roved down her spine to the curve of her ass and stayed there for just a brief moment before sliding further to press her flush with him. She had a wild urge to jump on him, wrap her legs around him. She knew he could hold her up.

She must have thought it loud enough. He pulled away from her mouth with a gleam in his eye that she'd certainly never seen before and lifted her bodily around the waist, leaving her legs dangling. He turned and backed her against the nearest wall, freeing his hands to lift her thighs around him.

“Solas...”

She didn't even know what she was going to say and it didn't matter anyhow because he was kissing her again, his mouth hot on hers, his teeth every bit as sharp as they were before. She crossed her ankles behind his back and dug her nails into his shoulders. He made a sound this time, low, growling and *delicious*. Tremors ripped through her at the feel of it. He trailed kisses down her chin and jaw, pushing her head to the side to reach her neck.

His teeth closed around her skin and she jolted in his arms. He'd found the perfect spot, just under her ear between her neck and her shoulder. He bit into the muscle there and she squeaked. He let go.

“Too much?”

“No...just wasn't expecting it. I probably should have, I mean, you are kinda wolf-like.” He grinned at her. His pupils were blown wide, obliterating the silver blue. He was flushed and panting and his lips were very red. She could only imagine what she looked like. He settled her more comfortably in his arms and leaned back from her a little bit, looking her over. “Something wrong?”

“You're elven,” he said, leaning in and nipping the edge of her ear. She could tell from the feel of his teeth on her that he was right, her ear was long and pointed. For so long she'd reverted to her mental image of herself as a human while dreaming. Did that mean she no longer thought of herself that way?

She gasped when he nipped her sharply again, and he stopped to press a gentler kiss to her lips. “You have made my whole world change, Carly.”

It was close, so close. She cupped his face with her hands, bringing him back to face her. She drew him closer, kissed him herself. “Say that again,” she whispered against his lips. “Again.”

“You change everything,” he said slowly, letting each syllable fall like a raindrop. “I should most likely be troubled by it, but I am not.”

“Yeah, you're not fighting it?”

“I know I should. I do not care to.”

She stroked the lines of his face. “Why should you? We have no secrets, no hiding. No false pretenses. Don't think I don't know you worry about that.”

“Is it so different? In your...version?”

“Fen'Harel hiding behind the apostate cover tries very hard not to lie. He won't take the relationship past a certain point, because the player doesn't have all the facts. It's rather admirable, really, if extremely frustrating.” She giggled and drew him close again, sipped at his lips. Her brain was mush and trying to put the words together was a challenge, but she needed to say it. “I like you much better this way. The real you. I know what I'm getting myself into here, Solas, ancient mage god.”

“You always knew it would happen, didn't you?” He didn't seem upset, merely curious.

“Actually? No, I didn't. I mean, I *hoped*...”

“Oh, and why is that?”

She grinned at him. “Because look at you, all mathematically perfect, smart, dry but funny. My snark has nothing on yours. Creative. Driven. Pained.” She cupped his cheek when he would have turned his head away. “You make me want to make it better, give you some happiness. You deserve it too. Everyone does.”

He huffed out a sound, a cross between a laugh and a groan. She tightened her legs around him, cutting off the sound on a sharp intake of breath. He pressed more fully against her, his mouth devouring hers again. She was ready for it this time, and met his passion in kind.

Fire ignited inside her and she wanted so much more than just bruising kisses. “Solas...”

“I need to stop before I cannot.”

“*We shouldn't, not even here. It isn't right.*”

She bit her lip, trying to control the tangle of thoughts and game memories in her head. He stared at the spot where her teeth showed and his face grew rueful. He let down her legs, keeping her against the wall until her feet were solid under her. As soon as he stepped away she felt cold, but he took her hand and tucked her close to his side.

It was only then that she realized they'd been making out against the wall of the Fade Chantry and she laughed outright. He gave her a questioning look. “Oh, I think it would take too long to explain it all. But...on Earth, a church is a sacred space. Consecrated. Most people wouldn't...”

He smiled, the very epitome of wolfish, and she lost both her breath and her train of thought. “It is a small rebellious act then?”

“Yes, *Rebel* Wolf. It is.”

His smile grew wider. “I'm glad to see some nuance remains to the translation, even from an Earth Dalish.”

She snorted. He looked impossibly young like this, and she treasured every second of it. She let him lead her away from the Fade Haven, each step taking them further from the drab town to somewhere greener, filled with dripping trees and soft grass. There was the rushing sound of water nearby, the sound bouncing off the walls of some place that hovered outside the edges of her perception. The air was filled with curious spirits, drawn by their presence. She closed her eyes and breathed deep. The scent of growing things was strong and wonderful, a testament to his fidelity in recreating the space in their heads. It reminded her of a time they walked in the Fade in the Emerald Graves. It must be somewhere he knew intimately well, and loved just as much to be so realistic in his mind.

“I like it here.”

“I will be sure to bring you here, in the waking world. Perhaps I will lay you down in the grass and not let you up again until I've had my fill.”

He turned her in his arms again and descended without warning. But she was already smiling, anticipating his move and she welcomed his lips on hers with a sigh. He let her drop back to her feet after long minutes had passed and rested his forehead on hers.

“I could stay here forever,” she said. “I know we can't. But I *could*.” He smiled, open and free. It was so rare to see that expression that it caused a jumble of images to collide in her head, some happy, others not so much. “Promise you won't leave me.”

Something changed in an instant. It was colder suddenly. His eyes no longer met hers. His breathing slowed and the smile disappeared like it had never been. Replaced by something pained. The edges of the glade began to blur. The spirits fled.

“I walk the Din'anshiral. There is only death on this journey. I would not have you see what I become.”

“Solas...no.”

“I'm sorry.” He stepped away from her, shaking his head. The Fade was losing its grip on her, she was waking up.

“I...can't. I'm sorry.” He turned and walked away.

“No,” she snarled, the sound echoing as through a thick fog. He started to dissipate into the grayness himself. “This conversation isn't over!”

She opened her eyes and saw the timbers that held up the ceiling of her chamber at Skyhold. She sat up and pounded the covers with her fist. “Goddammit!”

Setting Fire to Bridges

Chapter Notes

5/22/20

Content Warning: this chapter includes a scene of highly inappropriate use of magic between people who care about each other. I want to state that it is quick, accidental and no one is injured. I don't want any readers to walk into this chapter blind and get upset or triggered. (I know for myself, listening to people fight is highly anxiety inducing and writing this chapter was difficult.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Her head pounded and she was still tired after spending the rest of the night tossing and turning and there was a phantom sore spot on her neck that she stoutly refused to acknowledge. *Hungover and spurned, what a good look for the Inquisition.* She marched into the rotunda with every intention of having this out and done with for good.

“We need to talk,” she snapped when he glanced her way. He was calm as always, too calm, and that just sparked her ire further.

“Did you not sleep well?”

“Fuck you, you know I didn't. It's time to talk about this.”

“What would you have me say?” he asked coldly. “Pleasing diversions cannot take the place of my plans.”

“Save it for someone who doesn't know better how you feel about your *plans*. Do you really think I don't know what's going on in your head? That I can't follow the thought process, the loss, the *regret*? I'm trying to help you find a better way.”

“There isn't one,” he snapped back, anger sparking in his eyes.

“Ya know, I could have decided not to help you, I could have just let it all play out the way it was supposed to. You lose *everything* that way, you realize. The orb. Me. *And* the hope for restoring the past. You would have to start from scratch. Become the villain.” She paced in front of his worktable and he watched from his seat, hands steepled against his chin, the picture of serene reflection after his momentary flare. She wanted to throw something. Preferably at his shiny, bald head. “I want to change this outcome, Solas.”

“Why should *I*?”

She rounded on him, put her fists down on the table to lean towards him. “Seriously? Because I know that you are not a monster. No matter how shitty you're feeling about this lifelong quest of yours, *you are not* a monster.”

“You do not know that, Carly.”

“Yes, I do.”

He stood up then, came around the worktable until he was so close she could see the individual strands of silver and blue in his eyes. “You know me as a caricature, a copy. You do not know my true feelings on these matters, nor do you realize that as much as you think you know, you have not lived it. You have not faced each day, century upon century, millennia at a time. You do not know me.”

“I know that giving in to despair makes everything you sacrificed and fought for and rebelled against meaningless. Do you think I don't *want* to give you some peace?” She wanted to reach for him, hold him and tell him she could make it all better if he would just trust her to. But she was angry, angry that he was stubborn and superior and just so damn...Elvhen. “Solas, I know you're tired, and you've been alone for a long time. And you think you have all the answers and that you can fix this to your liking with a wave of your hand. That mistakes can be unmade without any consequences, but the real world doesn't work like that.”

“You think I don't know that?” he shouted, suddenly, startlingly. She took an instinctive step back. He threw his hands up in frustration. “I did what I had to do. Every alternative was worse. I never wanted *this*!”

“I know that.”

“And then you appear, and you throw everything into chaos with the lure of alternatives that you have no idea are valid or feasible. You twist my feelings, you warp my goal. You challenge my surety. I never wanted that either!”

“Hey, I never asked to get dropped here!” she shouted back. “I had a perfectly normal life on the other side, where none of this was real and I didn't have to live with the consequences of actions made because it was a fucking *video game*. Well, I'm not there now. I'm here, and I don't know that I'll ever get back, even if I want to. And that sucks! You think I'm not, right now, learning to live my life all over again just like you? That I haven't been reduced to some medieval post-apocalypse from everything I knew?”

She stopped, tried to calm herself down. Losing her temper wasn't going to get them anywhere. “Solas, I showed you what would have happened at Redcliffe. That was a future where I had failed and the world was more shit than it is now. Hell, it made this world look fucking perfect in comparison, you got to see it in my head, you can't deny it. And I would have been forced to make the same decision to rewrite it, to do it over. And then it would never have been mentioned again, because it was a fucking *game*. But I know the real world decision to rewrite history would have erased the choices of everyone who survived. It would have reduced everything in the world to a malleable commodity. And that isn't right! That isn't something a sane person does!”

She stopped again, knowing she was just working herself up, and powerless to stop it. “I knew it was coming, and you and I prevented it. Altered that course. Just as I have with so many other things, over and over. I know what I'm doing, damn you. I know full well what I'm asking. The lives of this world are not expendable. Given the choice between making this world actually have some fucking peace and quiet, or doing nothing and knowing that it all falls apart...what the fuck do you think I'm going to choose?”

“Why do you care so much?” he asked, almost desperate for an answer that would make sense to him.

“Because I *live* here now! Why wouldn't I care about its fate?”

And I love you, you stupid egg. I won't watch you become like the Evanuris.

He stopped short, and she knew he heard her errant thought. She let out a breath in a gust.

“Dammit, stay out of my head right now!”

“Carly...”

“No, I'm not finished. You want to restore the previous world. And on some levels I have no objections, because the elves *do* deserve better, and magic *isn't* a tool to be feared. But I don't want you to burn this one to the ground to do it, especially not when I have to exist here too. The people who already exist here never asked for this either, but they've made lives for themselves, cultures that have grown and thrived. Your people aren't the only ones who matter. Why is that so hard for you to get through your stubborn, *prideful* skull?”

“Enough!” he shouted, and a wall of force came off him as his own temper snapped. She was thrown back, sliding across the floor to crash against the far desk in a heap. Everything on the worktable shattered and toppled. She cried out as every nerve stood on end and *screamed*. Her ears were ringing and she shook her head to clear it. The Anchor throbbed. He was staring at her from across the rotunda, blank with shock and half spattered with paint. She ignored him and looked at her palm.

The Anchor pulsed green and was bleeding at the edges. And all at once she put it together.

He made it, just as he stored his own energy in the orb. He was going to use it to enter the Fade. I even knew this. It's a key. A bridge. Why didn't I see the obvious connection before?

“That's how you do it, how you dip into my head,” she whispered, assuming that he could hear her words despite the distance. “You're tied to the Anchor, because you created it. It's tied to me because I absorbed it. And you're a mage, so you can access the bond and I can't, because I'm just an archer and not really even an elf.”

He crossed to her, held out his hand to help her up. She just looked up at him and didn't take it. His face was full of sadness and regret. Lines creased his forehead and around his mouth, tired lines, hopeless ones. His hand dropped and he crouched down instead, meeting her eyes at her own level. A thought snagged in her mind that he would always do that, always kneel to get on her level, because no matter what else he was or did, he respected her and didn't actually *want* unlimited power. Not even in the small dynamic between them.

“Ir abelas. I did not know that would happen.” He paused and took a steadying breath. “You are so much more than just the sum of your parts, Carly. But what you ask...”

“You're planning to rewrite reality anyway,” she said softly, keeping her voice as calm as she could over the thunder of her pulse. “Rewriting it to include the world as it exists shouldn't be that hard. Genocide for the sake of one race is not the answer here. In the game you...you ask the player if they wouldn't take countless lives to save their own people. And the answer is *no*, Solas. No amount of bloodshed is an acceptable level to replace something you don't even know is worth it. The Veil didn't destroy the Elvhen, their own infighting and choices did. Tevinter just mopped up what was left at the end of it. And you *can* find a way to save everyone, if you try.”

“It is not that simple.”

“Isn't it? What are you afraid of?”

“It would mean disrupting the flow of time for the last three thousand years. Politics, nations,

whole ages and events, all reset. The intricacies are numerous and delicate.”

“Isn't that what you're planning anyway? To rewrite the last three thousand years to a time when Elvhenan still existed and humans had no political power here? Isn't it? What are you doing to do, stop humans from ever landing here in the first place? No matter what you do, you'll have to work around the other races that live here too, you know. And even if you didn't, even if you destroyed the rest of the world, how would you stop the elves from their own infighting? Be a tyrant? That *would* make you a monster. That would make you no better than *them*.” His eyes turned icy and she thought maybe she'd gone too far. *In for a penny...*

“Mythal wouldn't have wanted this,” she spat at him, driving it home. “She cared for and protected her people. And the spark that remains of her has lived among them for centuries while you *slept*, hiding in the Fade. She watched them persevere through everything that's happened to them. Everything *you* put into motion. She has seen the worth that exists in them, downtrodden and beaten, but *alive*. She was your friend, your leader once, and your stubborn denial that anything here is worth saving spits in her face.”

He stood, the cold settling on him like a mantle. Whatever compassion she'd managed to eke from him disappeared like smoke. “You speak of things of which you have no understanding. I am finished with this conversation.”

She watched him walk away, right out of the rotunda. She knew she'd pushed, and pushed too hard. She felt heartbroken, and angry all over again. But she wouldn't change a word of what she'd said. He needed to hear it. He needed to have someone draw a line in the sand and tell him how wrong it was to cross it.

The thump of a book closing on the second story of the rotunda broke into her misery. She slumped further into her heap.

Dorian.

She'd completely forgotten anyone else was here. It was impossible to think that he hadn't overheard every single word. And no way to predict what he made of it all without talking to him. How much more messed up could this possibly get?

“Fuck.”

Chapter End Notes

Y'all...3K hits. I cannot believe this little idea has become so dear to so many already. I am squeeing with joy.

Feedback is the lifeblood, I always say, and you have provided it. I am overwhelmed at the response to this, and have been inspired constantly to keep writing it (it's currently over 110K words total in my document file, and it's not done yet). Thank you all so much, dear readers, from the bottom of my heart.

Assumptions and Advice

Chapter Notes

5/26/20

She picked up the shattered glass and broken crockery first. She found a spare vase that fit all the brushes and gathered them up, and found the pile of rags Solas used for cleaning that soaked up solvents and paints. She let her tears drop into the mess too, because it wasn't like her salt could make anything worse. Her hands moved methodically through the jumble, tidying, cleaning up in a tangible way that she wished worked elsewhere. She wiped off the spatters of paint already mixed from the table and the floor, righted the crocks of ash and lime. She checked the sturdy jars of pigment on their shelf in the cupboard, thankfully saved from the blast behind the doors of it. And she straightened out his chair from where it had moved. Oddly, the shard that habitually rested on the edge of the table hadn't moved. She didn't examine why she was cleaning up the mess, other than she felt responsible for it.

And then there was nothing left to clean, and only Dorian to face. She climbed the stairs to the second story and wound her way to his side where he sat comfortably ensconced in one of two wing backed chairs, the book he'd been reading once again spread out on his lap. Two cups of tea sat on a table nearby. Seeing them gave her a pang of pure nostalgic agony, but she forced it to pass. Sunlight filtered through the steam and she realized how much of the day had already gone by. By now there were others in the rotunda, researchers, Chantry folk, the assorted faces she saw every time she was here.

"Very civilized," she said, nodding to the tea.

"It is, isn't it?" he replied, marking the book and closing it. "Care to join me, Inquisitor?"

She sat opposite him and watched him watch her. She gave him a half smile and he returned it much more warmly, lingering on her reddened eyes. "How much did you hear?"

"Enough to put many puzzle pieces into place. Of course, that generated simply dozens of new ones." He reached for his cup and sipped it once before putting it back. "I don't even know where to begin."

"Take a number."

"I'm not sure that's a figure of speech that crosses whatever dimensions you have." He leaned forward, bracing his hands on his knees. She hadn't once made the assumption that Dorian Pavus was nothing more than a painted peacock with fluff for brains, because she knew it wasn't true. He seemed to have appreciated that. The look he gave her now was devoid of all his normal posturing, and his eyes bored into hers with seriousness. "And you have crossed dimensions, haven't you?"

She blew out a breath, reminding herself that he was more knowledgeable about theoretical magic than anyone else in Thedas. He probably had a greater grasp on her situation than anyone besides Solas himself. "Yeah. I have."

"A dimension where all of this," he waved a hand around encompassing more than just the

rotunda, "is fiction."

"Yup." She took a sip from her cup. It wasn't like the tea Solas made for her, of course not. But it was good just the same. "What is it about mages that can make a halfway decent cup of tea?"

"Knowledge of herbs and flowers, I would suspect. We're quite learned folk by necessity."

"Fair enough. All right, have you figured out where do you want to start?"

He thought about it. "How long have you been here?"

"In Thedas? About...oh...six months? I arrived when the Breach did." She held up her hand and showed him the Anchor. "Fun times."

"Quite, although that is not the word I would have chosen." He sat back, crossed one leg over the other. "Inquisitor..."

"Carly, please. Formal titles have zero bearing on this discussion."

"All right. Carly, do I want to ask who Solas really is?"

"Oh, he really is Solas. That's just...it's not all he is. And to be honest, Dorian, as much as I adore you, and I do, it's not something I think you should know. Not out of any disrespect for your intelligence, but..."

"Foreknowledge is dangerous."

"Yes. And I can't predict how many changes to the...timeline, there would be." She almost said canon, and wouldn't *that* have just made all of this more surreal. She'd thrown that baby out with the bathwater. There was no canon when it was really happening.

"What did you avert at Redcliffe, Carly?" He cocked his head to the side, that still serious gaze fixed on her.

"The amulet would have worked, Dorian. You and I would have been hurtled forward in time by a year. In the meantime that had passed, we would have been thought dead, and no one could have stopped Corypheus from successfully breaching the Fade and rewriting reality. We would have found the surviving members of the Inquisition being systematically tortured with red lyrium. While Corypheus would have orchestrated a coup in Orlais, killing Empress Celene and putting his Venatori in charge."

He was stunned into silence and stillness and she let it lie, let him process it. After several minutes he seemed to finally come back from wherever he'd gone. "And what would we have done?"

"We would have escaped, killed Alexius and used the amulet to bring us back to this timeline, and prevented it all from happening. No one would have known or lived that year but the two of us. But we would remember it, remember everything we'd seen."

"You had the foreknowledge to know it was coming."

"Yes, and Solas and I worked out a plan to prevent it all. Took out the middle man, so to speak."

"You already know how all of this ends, don't you?"

"Potentially. I've changed a lot of things." She made a face. "Not enough of them, evidently, but a lot."

"You're trying to change his mind from...whatever it is he's planning. Is that right?"

"Yes. You heard us. I want to save him from himself, and in doing that, save everyone else."

"Foreknowledge is dangerous, Carly."

She gave him a small smile, knowing what he was saying. She knew how it was supposed to end, and in knowing that, and changing it, she now didn't know shit. "Yes, it is. Some things can't be changed, however, no matter my own influence on them. Corypheus is still out there, and he *will* return. Stopping him needs to be my priority for now. But he isn't the end, Dorian. Not by a mile."

"That's rather terrifying."

"It is."

"That implies that Solas and his goal are the end."

"Originally, yes. I don't intend to let that happen."

"Is a mere hedge mage so capable of instilling that kind of fear?"

"Oh, yes."

"Hmm, that vehemence instills far more terror. I'm not going to ask, as we've already mentioned, foreknowledge is dangerous. However," he leaned forward again and took her hands in his.

"Should you need a willing ear, I am here. If nothing else, I can provide some counsel on how to better hide your true nature. Or I could just kill him."

"The first of my people do not die so easily."

"I doubt you could." She squeezed Dorian's hands. "Besides, I'd miss his stupid beautiful face. But thank you for the offer, and the ear. For now I just need you to play along like you don't know any of this."

"I am the homosexual son of a prominent Magister. Playing a role is inherent."

"I know."

He barked a laugh. "Yes, I suppose you do. My offer stands, Inquisitor. I will help you however I can."

"I'll remind you of that when shit turns sideways."

He raised a brow. "A colorful phrase."

"Hopefully not a colorful prediction." She stood up, ready to move on with the day and put this whole thing out of her head...if she could. "Dorian, I'm not going to ask you not to say anything to Bull, partly because you aren't the only one who knows anyway, and partly because I don't want you to have to lie to your Ben-Hassrath trained boyfriend."

He chuckled ruefully and didn't deny her assessment. "That being said...?"

"Just use discretion, please. The situation is precarious enough without everyone learning that I'm *not* the Herald of Andraste. The cover is a good one. I need to keep using it."

"I understand. May I ask, who else does know?"

“Varric. And Hawke. Cole.”

“And Solas, of course.”

“Yeah.” She cocked her head at him. “Anything else you want to ask before I try to forget this all happened?”

“You're in love with him, aren't you?”

“Yeah, I am. For whatever that's worth.”

“Hmm, then I don't need to tell you it is a difficult emotion, complex and fraught with traps hidden amidst the joys and wonders. Do not let it blind you into making mistakes.”

“I won't.” She huffed. “Famous last words, I know. I know these pitfalls, Dorian. I know where I stand, and I know better than he does where he stands. I think that's the problem.”

“As much as I am loathe to agree with something said in anger, he did have a point you should perhaps consider. What you know of us all is based upon a work of fiction in your world. There are facets to each of us that were likely not represented therein. Assumptions are as dangerous here as foreknowledge.”

She sighed. “You're right. Guess I need to work on that.”

“It is merely a suggestion, of course. Meant with the very best intentions.”

“I know. Thank you. I'll...I will keep it in mind.”

She leaned down and kissed the top of his head. He squawked with indignation that she didn't buy for a second. “Mind the perfection!”

She laughed, feeling it well up in her like healing. “You're so ridiculous, you know.”

“I know, but I'm so eminently charming you overlook it.”

“Yeah, I do.” She kissed his head again, giggling at his sputtering and left the rotunda. It wasn't enough to cure all of her troubles, but it was a start.

Crystal Clear

Chapter Notes

5/29/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly dragged her heels going through the Great Hall from her chamber. She tried hard not to look towards the rotunda doorway, but her eyes betrayed her. Then she was distracted from the misery that had been the last week of trying to work around an elf who wouldn't speak to her. Varric had company.

Company she had been both expecting, and not exactly looking forward to. Still, she owed it to the woman to at least give her a chance. Dorian's warning that facets of their characters hadn't been represented in the games stuck in her mind. He wasn't wrong, and it was entirely likely Bianca had been given the short end of the stick.

"I appreciate the warning, but you shouldn't have come here yourself," Varric was saying, word for word as she thought he would. "What if the Guild found out? Or what's his name?"

Carly saw Hawke leaning casually against the scaffolding still standing next to the door to the rotunda. She joined her, their arms crossed identically even though neither dwarf was paying the slightest attention to them.

"Have you met her before?" Carly asked.

"Once, just before the...well, before Anders blew up the Chantry. Didn't know the significance at the time. She still cares a lot for him."

"But...?"

Hawke shrugged. "It's been over a lot longer than either of them wants to admit."

"Old habits die hard."

"Indeed."

"Are you worrying for me or for yourself?" Bianca said to Varric, her tone light. It was hard to tell if she was trying to antagonize or tease.

"A little of column A, a little of column B. I'm the expendable one, after all."

"Aww, don't worry. I'll protect you."

Carly noticed Hawke turn rigid, her expression hard. The Champion might appear to be okay with Varric being friendly with his ex, but it was an act. Carly decided now would be a good time to interrupt before things had a chance to get ugly.

"Varric," she called, drawing his attention. His eyes flicked between her and Hawke, while Bianca's assessed her, dismissing Hawke entirely. Yeah, this was going to get interesting.

“Well, this is a surprise,” Bianca said as Carly went closer to them. “You're the Inquisitor, right? Bianca Davri, at your service.”

“Nice to meet you,” she said politely. “I'd love to say I've heard all about you, but...”

Bianca smiled, warm and cheerful. “I'd normally feel insulted, but I think under the circumstances, it's probably better that way.”

“She's taken a huge risk coming here in person,” Varric said, shooting her a look that wasn't quite a glare, but wanted to be. “Maybe for both of us.”

“Well, in the interest of keeping things moving, why don't you tell me what she's here for?”

“Bianca's got a lead on where Corypheus is getting the red lyrium.” Carly nodded as if it was new information to her, ignoring his pointed expression that said she wasn't fooling him. She had to keep in mind that Varric *didn't* know Bianca was the leak from the mine that allowed Corypheus access to the Primeval Thaig. And that was going to be rough later. Well, sooner started, sooner finished.

“Then let's get it taken care of.”

“There's an entrance we can get to from the Hinterlands,” Bianca said.

“Valammar.”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“The Deep Roads were once all connected. Some of them have survived the Ages.” Varric was glaring at her now. She had to stop laying it on so thick. She smiled at the smith. “Not to mention, we've already cleared the place out once already and blocked up the entrance the darkspawn were using to reach the upper levels.”

“I see.”

“The day is young enough, Varric. Could you run up and tell Dorian to get ready? Have him grab Bull while he's at it.”

“Sparkler, not...?” It was her turn to glare. “Right, Sparkler and Tiny.”

Carly watched him take off into the rotunda and turned to Hawke. “You joining this little expedition, Champion?”

“I wouldn't miss it.” Hawke hadn't missed the quiet emphasis on her title either, and her teeth gleamed in her smile.

There were Carta thugs waiting for them. Well, it had once been a profitable mine, so it wasn't much of a surprise that someone new moved in after the first batch had been cleared out. They scattered as soon as Bull charged them, barely putting up any fight. Only the mercenary guards and bowmen stayed long enough to be cut down by their party. Short work for a Tal-Vashoth, a Champion, a mage and herself. Varric made sure Bianca stayed out of it, bringing up the rear.

“Smugglers, not fighters,” Carly noted.

“I'm sure the smuggling business is booming these days,” Varric said sourly.

The Upper Terrace was quiet and empty, and they quickly moved down to the lower levels. “We need to get this done quickly,” Bianca said. “These idiots have been carting the stuff out in unprotected containers. We don't want to stick around long enough for it to start 'talking' to us.”

“Shit,” Varric muttered.

“It's a wonder we haven't been seeing more activity from our end of things, Boss,” Bull interjected.

“We have, I've just been dealing with it quietly.” Cullen and Cassandra had been staying on top of the shipments, tracking them and destroying whatever they found with Inquisition forces. “No need to advertise it out loud, you know. We've gotten leads on several buyers and routes and been able to shut it down.”

“Good thinking, Boss.”

“I do my best, Bull.”

They moved on, bypassing the already cleared out rooms but staying cautious. Behind her, she could hear Bianca and Varric chatting. Falling into an easy rhythm that clearly displayed how long they'd known each other. Hawke stayed at her side, her lips compressed into a line.

“You good?”

“I'm fine,” the Champion clipped. Then she sighed, giving Carly an apologetic glance. “I'm...not particularly fond.”

“I gathered. Don't think I would be either in your shoes. But hey, we were all young and stupid once.”

“Fair enough,” Hawke laughed. “Though most of our young and stupid stays in the past where it belongs.”

“True. Still, at least she's here to clean up her mess.”

“*Her* mess?”

“Shit.”

Hawke gave her a long look. She was well known for being reckless and impulsive, but never stupid. “It will crush him, you know.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“I suspect you do.” She huffed. “Better this way maybe, it might finally be put to rest for good. You owe me at *least* two beers after this, Inquisitor.”

“You've got a deal, Champion,” she answered without missing a beat. They shared a grin, hastily putting on more serious expressions as the others caught up and Bianca opened the door she'd built. There was minimal fighting, only some stray darkspawn that had found their way into this section after she'd closed off their other access. She noticed Hawke took them on with particular prejudice and remembered that in this worldstate, Bethany had become a Warden.

“How long do you think you'll be in Orlais?” Bianca asked Varric as they worked their way deeper.

“I don't know. At least until all this shit is dealt with, maybe longer. Why?”

“You'll have to stop by before Bogdan gets back. You should see my new workshop.”

Carly waited for Hawke to explode. Varric gave her a mild look, one that spoke volumes. *Choice made*. “I don't think that will be happening, Bianca,” he said softly. “I'm going to be busy.”

Carly had expected a fight in the lowest room, but when they got there, the room was littered with corpses. “The darkspawn got here first. I don't need to remind anyone to be careful what they touch.”

“Is that...?”

“Aha!” Bianca cried before Varric could finish. She brandished a key she'd picked up from a table and went to a seemingly blank wall. “There you are. They won't be able to use this entrance again.”

Carly could hear the gears working as the locks engaged. She stood back, waiting. She knew this was the moment Varric would put it all together. And he did. He growled, “Bianca. Andraste's ass, *you're* the leak?”

The smith turned to face him, her face set in a sorrowful expression. “When I got the location, I went and took a look for myself. I found the red lyrium and I...studied it.”

“You know what it does to people!”

“I was doing you a favor! I just...I wanted to figure it out.”

He pointed back to the body on the floor. “That's Larius, isn't it?”

She ignored his question. “I figured out that red lyrium has the Blight. Varric, do you know what that means?”

“That two deadly things combined to make something super awful?”

“It means it's alive,” Carly said, precluding a long argument. She still needed to get the rest of this out in the open. “What's Larius have to do with it, Bianca?”

“I needed a second opinion. And since the Wardens know the Blight, I asked to speak with one. Preferably a mage. He was my contact. He was really into helping my research. So I...gave him a key.”

“He was the Grey Warden we met in Corypheus's prison, Bianca! Shit. He definitely wasn't a mage before.”

“I didn't realize until you told me about the red lyrium at Haven, so I came to see. And then I well...I came to you.” She turned to Carly. “Varric told me what people were doing with it. I had to make this right.”

“You mean you told him you had a lead, so we'd jump to help you fix your mistake.”

The dwarf sighed. “Yes. But we *did* fix it. It's as right as I can make it.”

“Dammit, Bianca, you can't just treat this like one of your machines. You can't just take out a piece and replace it and hope it all works out.” Varric threw his hands in the air and gave a gusty sigh. “I should have known. As soon as you walked in, I should have known. We've done all we can here. You should...go home before someone misses you.”

“Varric...”

He made a noise at her, part disgust, part resignation. Hawke followed him as he left the room, and Bull and Dorian began to head out too, leaving Carly alone with the smith. “You did your best. But didn't it occur to you that we would figure this out?”

“I guess I just hoped...” She pulled herself together and gave Carly a hard stare. “Get him killed, Inquisitor, and I'll feed you your own eyeballs.”

“That's no longer your prerogative, Smith Davri. It's time to face that, for both your sake's. Go home to your husband and your life.” She gentled her tone, she even conjured up a smile for the woman although her loyalty to Varric made her not want to like her. “Let him move on, he deserves to. And you deserve better for yourself than to keep grasping at something that isn't there anymore.”

“You're not what I expected, Inquisitor.”

Carly's smile turned wry. “Yeah, I get that a lot. Now do us all a favor, and don't give that key to anyone. *Anyone*. Better yet, destroy it. Do I make myself clear?”

“As a crystal.”

She bought Hawke the requisite two beers and sat with her and Varric in a quiet corner of the Rest. “You all right?”

“I'm glad to have answers, but...shit.” He stared into a tankard and after a moment drank the whole thing down. Carly raised an eyebrow. Varric didn't usually *actually* do any drinking. It was mostly show. “I let this mess happen. I gave her the thaig. And I'm not good at dealing with shit like this.”

“Varric,” Hawke chided.

“What? You gonna tell me that's not the truth? If Cassandra hadn't dragged me here by force, I'd still be in Kirkwall pretending none of this was happening.”

“That doesn't sound like my best friend at all,” Carly said. “You've worked as hard as any of us to stop Corypheus.”

“Have I? I don't even know anymore.”

“Are you going to get maudlin on me now?”

He gave her a morose look. “You could have said something, you know. I'm assuming you knew all about this part already.”

“I did,” she replied with a nod. “We still needed her to lock it down. Whatever else her motives were, she wanted to make it right. And she did. No amount of me giving you a heads up would have changed that. And sometimes people need to find out the sky is blue on their own.”

“You saying I'm stubborn?” he snorted. Then he sighed. “Thank you, Carly. For...back there, and for sticking with me even though I'm a stubborn ass.”

She knocked her mug against his. “Anytime.”

This chapter turned out to be less a representation of what differences there could have been for Bianca and more bonding between Carly and Hawke. *shrug* Oh well, at least it didn't get catty.

I DO think Bianca got the short end of the stick when it comes to how she was written and portrayed. There was so much hype about how much she meant to Varric, and when we met her it was...underwhelming, to say the least. Her lines in this are taken right from her dialogue. All I changed were the characters' reactions to them.

What We Leave Behind

Chapter Notes

6/2/20

“Latest reports from the scouts in Orlais?” Carly asked Leliana as she and the advisors gathered at the War Table.

“You were correct in your idea that there is a Venatori plot to assassinate Empress Celene. I still am not sure how you suspected such a thing.”

Carly eyed her sypmaster calmly, she'd already thought this through. “It's what I would do in Corypheus's shoes. Disruption of a powerful nation by undermining its internal politics? Easiest way to make the entire South fall into chaos and unable to focus on his actions.”

“What matters now is how to prevent this,” Cullen said.

“The Empress is holding peace talks during the masquerade, right?” Carly asked.

“Yes,” Josephine said. “It is only four days away now.”

“And that's when it'll happen.”

“You really think it will be there?” Cullen asked, astonished.

Carly shrugged. “All the factions in one place, a public venue...of sorts. On the surface it appears to be an inviolable location. And if something *does* happen, it would be easy to cast blame around to someone else. I mean, c'mon, it's Orlais. The idea that Celene is vulnerable during the talks will have occurred to her, and security will be tight. But we'll be there, on the inside as formally invited guests...of her rival no less. We can slip extra troops in under the guise of being my honor guard.”

“Is this why you ordered court uniforms to such *exacting* standards?” Josephine exclaimed. “I admit I was concerned for the coffers with the expense you were putting into this.”

“Yes, I want every single one of us to have a full suit of chainmail under the uniforms. I want to be prepared for any eventuality.”

“Without giving away that we are prepared for it,” Leliana commented. “Clever. Who will you bring with you?”

“Dorian is familiar with the Game, albeit from a Tevinter perspective. Bull will be a good visual distraction, and we can utilize his Ben-Hassrath skills with no one the wiser. Solas will be perfectly invisible and disregarded as harmless as just another elf. They will be my eyes and ears on the ground, so to speak. Getting a peaceful conclusion to the civil war is critical, and not just for moving against Corypheus. Expendng our forces on controlling this infighting is getting old, we have better uses for our time.”

“Good enough,” Cullen said briskly. “I will begin preparations so we can leave for Halamshiral first thing in the morning.”

“Anything else we need to discuss?” she asked the others. After a chorus of negatives she nodded once and stepped back from the War Table. “All right, then. Let's get packing.”

She left the War Room and hesitated before going up to her chamber. She and Solas still weren't speaking, and that would have to change if she was going to count on him during this. She went to the rotunda.

He was wary when he saw her, standing stiffly with his hands behind his back. She didn't try to approach too closely. If anything, his expression turned more bleak, as if he thought she was afraid he might do something again. She really wasn't, she knew his mind blast had been an accident. But she wasn't quite ready to let him know she'd let it go. She was only human, after all. Well...sorta.

“Will you walk with me tonight?”

“Why?”

“We need to get this sorted. And I have something I want to show you. Please, Solas.”

There was the merest hint of curiosity bleeding through the icy distance he'd been keeping himself in. He gave a nod of his head. “Very well.”

Carly sat at the looking glass in her chamber, going over her face with a critical eye. She didn't look like the average Dalish elf, and did actually look very much like herself, if about four inches too short. She thanked whatever deity might be out there that she had a tendency for self insertion in her role playing media and had tailored her character to mirror her own looks, brown hair, green eyes. Soft cheekbones and small, straight nose. Lips too thin to be truly pouty, but mobile enough to be in a constant smirk at life. Anything else at this point would have driven her insane. And it seemed she had finally accepted and believed this image to be true, no longer seeing her human side in the Fade as she once had.

That being said, the pointed ears still felt odd and unfamiliar. They got cold too easily and folded weird when she slept and got tangled in her hair when she brushed it. The vallaslin on her brow and nose seemed overly self indulgent now that she had to live with it every day. She'd always been rather pleased with the custom drawing she'd made. Now...

Now it just hurt, with the way things stood between them.

She should already be asleep, but she wasn't exactly looking forward to this. Ever since their fight they'd avoided each other, which meant there had been no resolution to the harsh words they'd thrown around. He'd retreated to his murals – she noticed he hadn't stopped, although he was working on a different one now – and she'd held her meetings and judgments without complaint, taking up most of her daylight hours. She spent evenings in the Herald's Rest, pouring out her heart to Hawke, who got it far more completely than she expected. And she spent time with Krem, having him teach her some basic swordsmanship. She couldn't ask Bull, he was too big. And his eye was too knowing.

She'd worked hard to put all of this in motion while side stepping how she knew about it. Only Solas and Dorian knew what she'd avoided in the red future, but that also meant no one knew what else she would have learned there. Sending Leliana's spies to find the assassination plot hadn't been hard when it came down to it, and she was glad she thought of it.

She gave herself one last look in the mirror and forced herself to the bed to lay down. Sleep came

just as hard as she thought it would, but eventually it came.

He was already there, his face set in lines of cold disapproval. "You took your time."

"Insomnia."

"What was it you wanted to show me?"

She stretched out her hand to him. He glared for a moment, but took it. She focused on what she wanted to see, knowing now that that was how one moved through the Fade. Or at least, that was how he did, and because of the Anchor, she could do it too. She closed her eyes to see it more clearly inside her head.

When she opened them, they were in her apartment. She looked at her rumpled, mismatched furniture, the stack of magazines and newspapers that should have been recycled months ago, the fuzzy blanket hanging over the end of the couch, her controller haphazardly tossed on top of it. Her TV, with the gaming console below it. Her laptop sitting open on the tiny table with its single chair, a used mug on one side and crumb filled plate on the other. Traffic noise rose from the street below and she watched Solas move to the window to part the curtains and look out. Part of what she'd loved about this place was the view. He stood there a long time, seeing skyscrapers, cars, streetlights, power lines. The never-ending cacophony that was her world that she could still recreate in her mind's eye with enough clarity he could probably see as far as the horizon.

She moved to the kitchen, a cramped space with an electric stove, narrow refrigerator and even narrower dishwasher, the sink with its scratched and dented stainless steel. Her counter filled with coffeemaker, stand mixer and knife block. The cupboards and cabinets overflowing with pots and pans, boxes of instant meals and powdered pancake mix. A bag of sugar, a bag of flour. Olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil for when she had the rare urge to deep fry. She hadn't heard him follow her, but heard his sharp intake of breath at what he saw.

She let him pore over each item, holding them in his hands. She showed him the contents of the fridge, condiments, block of cheese, half a dozen eggs, nearly empty bag of bagels and a worn down stick of butter. Quart of milk in a plastic jug, leftovers from the nearest Chinese take-out that should probably have been thrown away already. An orange. A wilted bag of salad.

She didn't speak, but she thought about each thing in her head, clear enough that he was sure to pick it up. She thought about brewing coffee, the rhythmic slap and turn of the stand mixer as she made something in it. The rush of water in the dishwasher. He was equally as silent, taking it all in.

She left the kitchen and led the way to the bathroom door, letting him see the toilet, the shower stall, all her body washes and shampoo and her toothbrush. Q-tips and makeup remover and nail polish. The minuscule washer and dryer stacked on top of each other. Thick fluffy towels that were one of two extravagances for living as frugally as she did. And finally, she turned and opened her bedroom door.

Bed, messy with unmade sheets, pillows thrown sideways. Still, the thread count kept the creases sharp. Her other extravagance. Dresser topped with jewelry boxes, hair brush, clip and ties, and the charging dock for her phone. She thought hard and imagined her phone there, and it appeared. She opened her closet door and he saw her meager wardrobe hanging, shoes piled below in a heap. Her laundry basket was overflowing with jeans, socks, underwear and graphic print tees. Her zippered hoodie lay across the edge of the basket.

This is my world. This is what I gave up when I was trapped in yours.

He ran his fingers over a dress hanging in the closet that she hadn't touched in years. It was soft and patterned with tiny rosettes. It had been her mother's and it didn't really suit her taste. But she couldn't get rid of it. No, never. He found the collection of picture frames with a jumble of photos in them that hung on the wall. Seeing him here, in her own world, was beyond strange even knowing it was a dream. He didn't fit in the space quite right. Too *alien*. She wondered if he felt that way too.

He looked at the photo of a much younger her, standing between her parents when she graduated from high school. Fresh faced and beaming, cap and gown glowing out of the image. Her parents were so proud that day. And two months later they were gone, killed by a drunk driver on a wet street as they walked home from their anniversary dinner date. She'd been on her own for over eight years. She'd been granted enough money from the settlement that she didn't have to worry about paying the bills as an experimental tech beta researcher, as long as she lived economically. So she had.

"Ir abelas," he said, at last breaking the silence. He looked around the room again, taking in all the aspects of her previous life. He looked back at the photo of her and her parents. So happy and innocent. He studied it for a long time. "I did not know."

"Tel'abelas," she replied firmly. *I am not, and never will be, sorry. There are many advantages to my world, conveniences. But I was alone here. And I am not when I'm with you. Even though we fight.*

She looked around her room again, her eyes misting as she pondered all the times she thought she'd missed it. She really hadn't. It was colorless in her memory now unless she concentrated. Few friends, fewer lovers. A job she adored that allowed her to play video games to escape real life, but didn't have any real impact. Day to day existence without meaning. Not even a pet to keep her company. She shook her head, rueful and regretful by turns.

"Seen enough?" she asked, no longer looking at him.

"Yes."

She let her hold on the imagined space go, let it trickle from her grasp like so many grains of sand. It grew pale and washed out, the edges fraying like an old photograph. The Fade turned quiet as the traffic noise disappeared and he disappeared too.

"Thank you," she murmured to the spirits she knew were lingering there, the emotions and memories that had made the dream tangible. Then she left the space as well, waiting to see what else the Fade held for her. But no more dreams came.

Reconciling the Game

Chapter Notes

6/5/20

Her feet hurt, the formal Inquisition uniform was remarkably stiff and uncomfortable – especially over the layer of chainmail – and she was starving. But the nobles were intrigued by her, solving all their little problems and puzzles with an alacrity no one but a handful knew was because she already knew where to find everything. Even as she gathered up a hefty assortment of blackmail evidence against all the parties involved in the civil war.

Solas smirked at her from his casual lean against a pedestal. He watched her watching him for a moment before he pointed at the plate by his side, concealed behind his elbow. She shot him a grateful smile. They hadn't spoken much since she took him to her world, but the tension had broken. He'd been more introspective and she caught him often just observing her interact with her companions and the myriad things she did to keep the Inquisition running. Especially as they'd traveled overland to Halamshiral.

“Are you holding up?” he asked now as she wolfed down the tidbits and canapes he'd loaded onto the plate. He held out his glass to her to wash it all down, the look in his eye unreadable. Was sharing a glass some Elvhen thing she didn't know about? She mentally shook her head and focused.

“I'm getting awfully tired of being called rabbit, if that counts for anything. Don't these people know a rabbit will kick the shit out of you if trapped?” She sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Anyway, if what I remember is correct, I'm more than halfway to where I need to be to make this all work out right.”

He snorted. “You are no mere ornament of the Inquisition, remember that. No one has paid me the slightest attention, but you are becoming the talk of the evening. You have played the Game well, I am proud of you.”

“Thank you,” she said simply, feeling like a layer of confidence had been added to her armor with his praise. He brushed a crumb from the corner of her mouth and she stiffened, trying very hard to hide it. He smiled, apologetic for the presumption.

“Not long now, I shouldn't think,” he said softly.

“Oh, a few more hours, at least.”

“Standing here talking to your elven 'manservant' is probably not winning you any favors. You should not linger.”

Despite everything it tickled her to see how much he was enjoying himself. Tucked away in a corner, relatively unseen while blatantly calling the whole nation out with his pointed hat. She had to say, without the nose piece clipping through his face like the game, it wasn't as terrible looking in real life as she'd expected. She resisted the urge to pay him back in kind by adjusting it.

“Aw, you're not going to say how much you've missed court intrigue?” She grinned at him instead, knowing he could probably hear the line in her head. *I do adore the heady blend of power, intrigue, danger and sex that permeates these events.*

His eyes lit up with merriment. “Do I need to say it, if you already know it?”

“Oh, but it comes out so smooth,” she leaned in to whisper playfully. “That's just you all over, isn't it? A pretend apostate mage who could run circles around their Game, blindfolded with one arm tied behind his back. Of course, the effect does get slightly ruined later if I call you out on it in the game. 'Seen it in the Fade', uh huh. Pretty sure that's the only time you ever actually lie, and you're *atrocious* at it. Like, there's actual stammering.”

He raised an eyebrow at her teasing. Seeing her in good humor seemed to restore his, and he shook his head at her, a glimmer of his typical sly coming through at last. But he was right, she needed to keep moving.

“Fine, I'll leave you alone. I need to get this over with anyway, as much as I'd love to just hide here with you. Just be ready, I'll need you in a bit.”

“I will be ready. Now, the Inquisitor cannot hide. It's unbecoming of her.” There was a wealth of admiration in his words and she barely noticed when he straightened up, turned her around and made a pretense of aligning her uniform perfectly on her shoulders. He smoothed the fabric with a careful touch, tucking the sash more firmly into her belt at her waist. She could tell he was making sure she still had her mail shirt underneath. Which was a telling bit of worry, since when would she have had the opportunity to take it off? They all had chain mail under their regalia. Unless it was just an excuse to touch her in public. *Always a rebel*, she thought, and he choked back a snort. *Caught you.*

“Go on,” he whispered, nearly in her ear. She shivered and hoped it wasn't obvious.

“I'll be back later.”

“Hunt well.”

For some reason she hadn't expected him to say it, especially not in that warm, rich tone that was nevertheless carefree. But once he did, she felt like the world had righted and she was back on solid ground. That things were *normal* again. It gave her the courage to do one last thing and she turned back to look at him. “Do you have any interest in dancing with me later?”

“A great deal. When our work here is done. Yes, I would like that.”

She moved on, feeling like she could fly as she dealt with poking into empty rooms she shouldn't have access to, picking up notes and blackmail alike. She needed to find Morrigan, but so far hadn't seen her. Until she was making the rounds of the eavesdropping spots in the vestibule again, collecting more gossip for Leliana.

“What have we here? You have been searching in every dark corner of the palace, have you not? You are quite the delightful mystery, Inquisitor,” she said, approaching on carefully controlled steps in the dress that must weigh a ton looking at it from this side of a screen.

“And how is that?” Carly replied, eager to see her and get this part done, even if she wasn't looking forward to having to see the carnage of the servants' quarters with her own eyes. But it was her ticket to finding Briala herself, and getting this farce moving onward to its conclusion.

“You are a Dalish elf in appearance, but that is not the sense I get from your...presence.”

“And what will you do with that information, Morrigan?”

She watched the Witch of the Wilds' eyes go wide, the only sign she gave that her fame had preceded her. Or at least, that's what she could assume. “I am not sure yet. You seem to be working towards peace in Orlais, from which I will not stop you. All evening I've watched you solve little mysteries, and some larger ones too. All without seeming to speak to anyone until after you have attained what they required. The Court is intrigued, which is akin to approval here. The only question that remains is why you are here in the first place.”

“As you said, I am working towards peace in Orlais.”

“A most fascinating development. You have been hunting in every corner. I wonder if we hunt the same prey.”

Carly just smiled. As much as she wanted to trust Morrigan right away, she also knew she couldn't play too loose with things just yet. It was up to Morrigan to make the first move, and she did, handing over the key to the servant's quarters.

“I assume you will find a use for this.”

“I will. And you should return to Celene's side before you are missed. It wouldn't do to skip any of the excitement.”

The Witch smiled at her, provocative and assured of her place. “No, t'would not. I look forward to speaking with you again...Inquisitor.”

Carly held the key tight in her grip and went to collect her team.

“By Imperial decree, I am to be liaison to the Inquisition. Celene knows you face a foe far greater than her need to satisfy her curiosity for the arcane.”

“I'm glad to have you, Morrigan.”

“I look forward to satisfying my own curiosity about you as well, Inquisitor. I shall meet you at Skyhold.”

Carly looked out across the view from the balustrade but she wasn't seeing it. She was utterly exhausted and had had more than enough political machinations to last her a lifetime. Still, she'd managed to stop the Venatori and the attempted coup, gained the support of the Fereldan mercenaries *and* blackmailed all three of those idiots into working together.

100 Court approval to me. Yay! Even her thoughts had turned sour and sarcastic she was so tired.

She leaned on the railing and let her head hang down, trying to release the tightness in her neck and shoulders. Chainmail was exceedingly heavy after so many hours. At this point, she wanted a stiff drink and a hot bath. And enough sleep to drown out the Fade.

“I'm not surprised to find you out here,” she heard Solas say. He leaned down next to her, entirely too close for her peace of mind. “Thoughts?”

“Oh, damn, I missed it.” She smiled at him and brought up a mental image of him raising his eyebrow at Morrigan. He offered her another view of it, raising it high enough that it disappeared under the helmet. “Anyway, it's been one hell of a day. But I did what I set out to do. Pity the

uniform's got blood on it now.”

“It fits you well. It was...enjoyable, watching you fight in it.”

She snorted to herself, recalling a line she didn't think she'd get a chance to say. “Sweet talker. Hey, did you get a chance to talk to Briala? I know you need to.”

He made a face at her, equal parts chiding for openly speaking of it and surprise that she knew at all. She just grinned at him some more. He chuckled ruefully and held out his hand. “Dance with me.”

“You remembered.”

“Of course. I hardly think it would look good for you to dance with me on the ballroom floor in front of all the nobles you have just connived into bettering themselves. So... we shall do it here. Come, before the band stops playing.”

She put her hand in his, but pulled him to a stop when he stood up to sweep her into his arms. Something in his tone tipped her off that he was really just looking for an excuse to talk to her, and not about his clandestine matters with the powerful Orlesian elf. “What's on your mind?”

He tugged her easily to him, moved her smoothly to the music just barely reaching them on the balcony. His hand was warm on her back, and he held her closer than was strictly necessary. She wasn't complaining, however. He doubtlessly knew that too if the look in his eyes was anything to go by.

“I have had a great many years to adjust to this world, even though I viewed it through the lens of the Fade. And indeed, preferred the memories buried deeply there to the concerns of the present. I was powerless to stop cataclysm of circumstances that shaped the People into what they are now, and I cursed them for their inability to fight back. You have forced me to face my own complicity in that cataclysm – not for the first time, I might add – and I repaid you by saying many thoughtless and disparaging things that I should not have. I lashed out in anger, and caused you harm. Forgive me.”

“I said a lot of things too, that I could have found a kinder way to say, or just kept to myself. I'm sorry. Where does that leave us, Solas?”

“If you think there is another way, a way that will bring the People back to their former glory without sacrificing this world to do it, I am willing to listen.”

“Just like that, eh? You sure you aren't finally compromising just because you're horny?”

He smirked hard enough for a shadow of a dimple to show and he leaned in close to whisper in her ear. “I am not agreeing to listen just to get you into bed, although I am certain that will be a pleasing side benefit.”

She could feel the heat of her blush rise up her throat and into her cheeks even as he leaned back and she could see the laughter in his eyes. “You're always so damned sure of yourself, Fen'Harel. What makes you think I still want you there, hmm?”

The music ended and he swept her down, bending her backwards in his arms. She had to cling to him to keep herself from falling, her fingers curled into his uniform. He pulled her back to her feet and released her, just to cup her face in his hands. He kissed her sweetly and slow. She didn't even think about fighting it or pulling away. The kiss deepened by degrees but never took more than it gave. Heat pooled in her belly, igniting a storm of flutters. His fingers rested against her pulse,

measuring its leaping.

“Do you deny it?” he asked when he pulled back, still smirking.

“You're insufferable.” But she was smiling.

“And still you want me.”

She sighed and dropped her head onto his chest. His arms came around her and held her close.

“Yeah, all right fine, I do. Ma fen. I am very ready to go home, but for now, can you just stay here with me?”

“Yes, I can do that.” He chuckled and laid his head on top of hers, tucking her securely under his chin.

Names, Myth and History

Chapter Notes

6/9/20

It was quiet in the garden, and Carly craved some quiet. Too many fingers in too many pies. If it wasn't one thing it was another, and getting her bearings after everything in Halamshiral just made it harder. Judgments, the supposition that she would allow two of her Inner Circle to disappear for who knew how long to elect the new Divine...although she'd already made her decision on that one. Josephine had troubles, there was Cullen's lyrium withdrawal to be handled, Cass's distrust of damn near everyone. Her Ben-Hassrath was now Tal-Vashoth. Dorian's shit with his father that had gone about as well as expected. Vivienne's desperate need for a wyvern heart that wasn't going to make a difference. That one was actually a priority. Even though she and the Grand Enchantress were not close, she was still sympathetic regardless of knowing how it would end.

Honestly though, the only people who weren't bothering Carly for favors were Varric and Solas, and that was because she'd already dealt with their respective messes. Well, she was back on good footing with Solas, if nothing else. He was still a mess. They were as yet tiptoeing around each other like they might break if they moved too suddenly.

She sank onto a bench and just breathed for a while. When she looked up, a boy was approaching. She smiled to the child and he gave her a shy one back. Time for this conversation then. That meant Morrigan had arrived.

"You're the Inquisitor," the boy said.

"I am. Hello, Kieran."

He beamed that she knew his name. "Hello. Mother never told me you were an elf. But you aren't really, are you?"

"How can you tell?"

"It's your blood. It should be old...but it's not. Only parts of it are. It sings a melody I don't know." He looked far too knowing and self contained for a child his age. He should be racing around the castle like a holy terror. *Old god baby*, she thought, mentally rearranging. That meant the Hero of Ferelden was still alive out there, somewhere. She was surrounded by old gods, of every color and stripe. That would get interesting later. She patted the bench next to her to invite Kieran to sit.

"I'm an elf now, I suppose. I can't get back to my world." No use hiding it from him, since he could see it plain as her nose.

"You do not want to anyway," he said, with all the firm assertion of a child combined with all the assertion of a being nearly as old as...well, Solas.

"You're right, I don't. I like it here."

"But it hurts."

She chose to think of that as being about the Anchor and not the deeply hidden ache of everything else and looked at her hand, the mark currently quiescent and numb. She knew the more she used it, the more painful it would grow. Like a branch splitting slowly from a tree with every gust of wind. And just like that branch, it would eventually be severed. "It won't forever."

Morrigan found them there and for a moment looked worried. "Kieran, are you bothering the Inquisitor?"

"Not at all, Morrigan," Carly said before he could reply. "I've been waiting for him."

The mother looked startled, but the boy laughed, suddenly as carefree as he should be. "You will be happy here, I know it."

"That's good, I'm very glad to hear it. Now, I think your mother wants you to return to your studies. You can explore later. There's a fine spot up in the rookery where you can see just about everything, but I'll only take you there if you do all your lessons." He sighed and looked at Morrigan, who nodded. He walked off, too stately and slow for a boy, but just right for a god. Morrigan seemed to be debating with herself and Carly invited her to sit where he had. "A polite and well-spoken lad."

"He is. I go to great lengths to protect him from my own reputation, as well as his..."

"Legacy?"

"If you like. He is a curious boy, and this keep is large. He will not make trouble."

"I know."

"His true nature is rarely revealed among strangers. How did you know about him?"

"The same way I know about everything happening here." She faced the Witch calmly and waited to see how much she could put together herself.

"You are touched by something not of this world."

"That's one way to put it. An accurate one, at that. Just don't spread it around. Only a handful know."

"The elven apostate," she guessed.

"Yes. And Varric. Hawke. Dorian, which probably means Iron Bull. Cole. Leliana suspects something, but not exactly the truth."

"Andraste's Herald. 'Tis a cover, then."

"For the moment. It has its uses, although I wish it was easier to avoid some of the duties."

"You are not what I expected."

"Oh, I don't doubt that. I expect you thought you'd be the most mysterious person here. Witch of the Wilds. Mother to a boy who carries the spark of a corrupted Tevinter god pulled from an Archdemon. You've walked an interesting road, Morrigan. Whatever else is happening, I'm glad you're here. I...the Inquisition needs you."

"I am at your disposal." The words came out twisted a bit, as if she had to fight to say them. Carly laughed lightly, hoping to dispel the tension.

“Don't worry. I'm not going to abuse the privilege.”

Morrigan leaned back on the bench, looking across the garden to the keep itself. “To think, until recently this place stood decrepit. Occupied only by the desperate and the lost. Now t'is party to events that threaten to shake the whole world. Tarasyl'an, that means...”

“Tarasyl'an *Te'las*. The Place Where the Sky Was Held Back.”

“Back'?”

“Yes.”

“I've never heard it translated as such. The elven myths...”

“Are wrong a lot of the time. I wouldn't rely upon them too much. It's not surprising, they've lost...well, everything. Factual history is usually the first thing to go. It becomes myth and legend, exaggerated at every telling, muddled and misshapen until it no longer resembles anything like the truth.”

“You are a strange being, Inquisitor.”

“Carly, please. The title is kind of like the myths and legends. It's not who I am.”

“And who are you?”

“Just a woman, trying to save the world. I fell into a magical realm, complete with my own castle.” She waved her hand around to encompass Skyhold. “Lucky me.”

“Fate is often mistaken for luck, as Mother is fond of saying. This fortress was built on a site holy to the ancient elves. I wonder if you know what you have in it.”

“I do,” Carly replied with a secret smile, looking at the high walls and thinking of exactly what she knew lay beneath it. Or rather, *didn't* lay beneath it. “Probably more than most.”

“That does seem evident. The magic of this place has seeped into the stones, protecting it from darkness. Those who let it fall into ruin did not know what they possessed.”

“No, they didn't.”

“How did you come to be here? At Skyhold.”

“Solas led us here. He knew of it...from the Fade.”

“A Somniari, then. They are so rare in this Age.”

“And he more than most too.”

“You are fond of him.” It wasn't a question.

“I would not have survived the events at Haven without him.” She rubbed the Anchor, feeling it twinge under her skin, a restless energy that never truly stopped, even when it was quiet. It was seeking the orb, and she needed to keep that in mind for when she faced Corypheus again. “At any rate,” she went on, turning her thoughts away from that future date, “this is a good home for the Inquisition. Defensible, large enough to hold us all. It will be enough.”

“You were kind to welcome my aid so readily. I will do my best to help your cause will all the

knowledge at my disposal, this I swear to you.”

“I appreciate that. Is your Elvuian here yet?” The look on Morrigan's face made her laugh out loud. “Sorry. Sometimes I don't know when to quit.”

“My extensive breadth of knowledge seems unnecessary, Inquisitor, since you know so much already.”

“Your part to play in all this is more than just as an advisor.”

“What do you mean?”

“Hmm, how to put this.” She thought for a minute. She needed Morrigan to come to her own decision about finding the Well of Sorrows, and knowing what she did about Flemeth, Carly knew she couldn't rush that. *That* was a tangle she wasn't looking forward to particularly, especially knowing now that Kieran held the spark of Urthemiel inside him. “I know what Corypheus carries, and I know what he plans to do with it. I even know what our next step should be to head him off. That being said...there are avenues of study you should focus on without just taking my word for it. I know you don't know me or anything about me. And I can only shift so much of the events.”

“Shift?”

“There are things in motion that need fixing. Knowing how they play out means I want them to work in a certain way. But I know I can't force all the things to my will just because I know how they end, if that makes any sense. There is an extensive library here, and plenty to research. It would be easy to just tell you what we need to do, but I'm fully aware that you have no reason to trust me about any of it. You need to discover it on your own.”

“Tis a terrible burden, to have too much knowledge,” Morrigan said sympathetically. “I shall do as you advise.”

“Thank you.”

“Inquisitor...Carly...should you ever need to talk, to unburden yourself...”

“Well, you did say you were curious,” she laughed. “Thank you for that, too.”

Tainted Love

Chapter Notes

6/12/20

throws headcannons around like glitter and runs away

Also, apologies ahead of time for the emotional whiplash.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She took her first sip and vowed to love Iron Bull forever for his generosity. Of course, his generosity might have been helped along by the fact that of everyone here, only she even knew what the dark, blocky package Varric had somehow sourced was. He'd split off a good sized chunk of it, handing it to her with a solemn expression in his eye that made her grin. He let loose his own returning grin shortly after and wished her good fortune with her 'prize'.

She searched through the pantry cupboards, climbing right up onto the counter to do so, much to the amusement of the Skyhold kitchen staff. But she found what she was looking for. A pinch of this, a scrape of that. There, *now* it was perfect. She cradled the mug in her hands and wandered to the rotunda. A quick look up to Dorian – as well as an eloquent jerk of her head to tell him to get lost – and then she searched for Solas.

He was on top of a scaffold, working some tiny detail into the mural that would be impossible to see unless one was right in front of it. She knew better than to say so, however. Never interrupt the artist at work.

Even if he has a cute butt, she finished the thought loudly.

Solas paused in the middle of a brush stroke, then began again without even looking over his shoulder at her. There were definitely some interesting perks to this mental connection, and she'd long ago stopped fighting it, although there were still times she distracted him from dipping with pop music that inevitably got stuck in his head. It made her giggle how many times she'd heard him humming something under his breath he'd picked up from her.

“You cannot even see it,” he said when she was at the foot of the ladder.

“From here I can.”

“To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“Just wanted to watch.” She sipped her cocoa and let the rush of sugar, spices and warmth fill her. She let out a small hum of absolute hedonistic enjoyment. Solas jolted. She grinned into the rim of the mug.

“You are too far away to fully appreciate the work,” he said.

“Not at all. I can see just fine from here.”

“Do you not care for heights? Past history would point to that being patently untrue.”

"The painting isn't my objective, Solas." *Last call for Captain Oblivious.*

He finally looked down at her, his face wearing a mock scornful expression as if *she* was the oblivious one. "Perhaps I wish you to join me up here."

"And why would I do that?" she retorted with a raised eyebrow. He just smiled. The crafty warmth of it hit her square in the chest, better than any hot cocoa. Which, now that she thought about it, presented a problem. She couldn't very well climb the ladder with a mug in her hands. She sipped it again and then held it as high as she could. "You'll have to take this, then."

He let out a long suffering sigh that she didn't believe for a second, then bent down to take the mug from her. She climbed the ladder and came up on top of the scaffold to see him sniffing her drink. "What is this?"

"Mine." He appeared transfixed and she bit her lip. So the way to an elf god's undivided attention was chocolate. Who would've guessed? "It's hot cocoa. Ya know, the stuff Bull had Varric get for him?"

"I thought he was joking."

She reached out for the mug, but he hadn't noticed. So she stepped closer to him and poked him in the hip, startling him. She took back her mug and sipped it. "If you're a really good boy, I might let you taste it," she taunted. "Maybe."

Lascivious on Solas's face was still a shock and she momentarily forgot what she was doing. Which gave him enough time to take the mug from her fingers gently and set it on the floor of the scaffold before he leaned in and kissed her breathless. His tongue swiped across her lips and she opened for him without a thought. She'd planned to tease it out longer, but...

There was no denying *this* was better.

"Hmm, I think I like it."

"I think you just like making me turn into a frustrated puddle," she managed, heart hammering in her chest.

"You could be right."

"How long do you plan to keep doing it?"

"Long enough."

He went back to his painting as if that hadn't just happened and she bent down for her mug in a highly bemused state. She shuffled out of his way and sat down on a crate he'd somehow wrangled up there. The lantern stood on it and she was careful to sit wide of it so she didn't knock it over.

"What is the next step?" he asked after a few quiet minutes had passed. She rolled the remaining chocolate around in her mug, watching the spices swirl across the surface. She didn't think his question was about their flirtatious dance.

"Adamant Fortress. Corypheus has corrupted the Gray Wardens with red lyrium, hijacking the Calling and turning them into vessels for demons. He's making an army, and by the time we get there, his minions will have them sacrificing each other to get it done for him." She sipped, holding the sweetness on her tongue before spitting out the rest of the bitter. Because *of course* there was more. "Obviously, we have to stop him. And I'd really like to do that without ending up physically

in the Fade this time.”

“Physically?”

“Yeah. You made the Anchor, you know what it does.”

“You should not be able to wield such power yourself, as a mortal.”

“You are absolutely correct. This thing is gonna kill me eventually.”

“Carly!” he exclaimed. She looked back at him, saw that he'd stopped painting and was staring at her in horror.

She scoffed. “What did you think was gonna happen to me? You said it yourself, it's too much power for a mortal. I'm not worried, you know. I know I don't die.”

He frowned and made a quick negative movement of his head, then put down his brush and knelt at her feet. “What you know from your world has no bearing here. Haven't you learned that yet? You could very well die.”

“But I won't, Solas. You won't let me.” She cupped his cheek and he leaned into it, relaxing under her touch. “Will you.”

“No, I will not.” He gusted out a breath. “But you already knew that. Even in the beginning.”

“I did.” She nodded, sad that the light mood had been broken. But it was necessary, she supposed. “When we get there, stick close to me. I don't want to risk the circumstances that would lead to us needing to use the Anchor. You're the Fade mage. You have much more ability to shift this event than I do.”

“Are you certain you wish to do this?”

“Have to. If we let the Gray Wardens fall...” She sighed. “Look, I know you don't like them for whatever reason. But they are the best defense against the darkspawn Thedas has. I hope you realize that whatever rewriting you do of the world won't be able to prevent the Blight from happening.”

“It should if the idiot Magisters never get to enter the Golden City and corrupt it in the first place.”

She shook her head emphatically. “Solas, the City was already corrupted when they got there. Corypheus said when he saw the throne of the gods, it was empty. He wasn't speaking in metaphor. They were looking for their own Ancient Gods. But those are supposedly entombed in the Titans. The Primeval Thaig that Varric and Hawke found in the Deep Roads predates modern dwarven civilization, which in turn predates human civilization in Thedas. It was purposely sealed to contain red lyrium...since it's Blighted. Lyrium is the lifeblood of the Titans. You knew that, right?”

“I know about the Titans, yes.” He was watching her carefully now, his face held like a mask. She was very close to figuring something out, she realized. There was a connection to be made between the Titans, the Evanuris and the Blight.

“Wait. The Blight is part and parcel with the very fabric of this world now. You say it yourself, it isn't something that can be casually outsmarted. Why would you know that...unless you tried.”

Solas *knew* the City was already corrupted. Sealing it behind the Veil was the only thing that made sense. Sealing within it the source of the taint.

“The Evanuris *are* in the Black City,” she said, slowly working through her thoughts. “Trapped in Eluvians. Cole knows they're behind mirrors, it's something he says in the game and you end up taking the knowledge of it right from his head. An old pain he can't fix. The only mirrors of any power *are* the Eluvians, and *you* control them. Well, most of them. You tricked them into trapping themselves, disconnected them from the network, put the City in the Fade then put up the Veil as a further defense against anyone reaching them. Didn't you? Because every alternative was worse; they were already Blighted. Letting them escape would have destroyed the whole world. That's why the others killed Mythal, isn't it? She was the voice of reason, because *she* escaped the Blight, somehow. As you did.”

He withdrew from her abruptly. His face had gone smooth, hard as marble. His eyes were flat and cold. She'd put it together. His only crime had been locking away the most powerful sect of Elvhen mages after they'd been corrupted by the Blight. It wasn't a crime at all. It wasn't a betrayal. She knew the Evanuris weren't all evil monsters in the beginning, but they changed over time. The taint drove them all mad. In the end even Mythal had changed.

“An eternity of torment was the only fitting punishment,” she quoted, awed by the implications. “But that wasn't it at all. You were just trying to save existence itself from the Blight.”

“Stop!” he barked, hoarse from controlling his reaction.

She stared at him. He wasn't a trickster, he was a savior. But history is written by the victor, and once the Elvhen were broken, the only victor was the Tevinter Imperium, sweeping across Thedas with a subjugating hand while he slept for years uncounted. His legacy had been twisted and forgotten, now he was only the god who locked the other gods away, with no mention of *why*. And everything he'd fought for fell apart anyway.

His reaction was troubling, however. Why didn't he want her to figure this out? What else was she missing?

“What else is locked in the Black City, Solas?”

“Nothing, now.” His voice was flat, cold.

The Blight *was* the missing piece. The Golden City had been corrupted with the Blight, because he had stored it there. He and Mythal *had* conquered it, *had* taken it from Andruil before she could destroy all her lands with it. There had been no Blight in recorded history until the Sidereal Magisters had forcibly entered the Fade, bringing it back with them. They had let it consume them, because of promised power. Blight magic was as powerful as blood magic.

Blood.

Red lyrium was tainted.

Lyrium was the blood of a Titan.

“Solas...where does the Blight come from?”

The look he gave her was pained, as if she'd stabbed him. She could tell just from his face that she'd finally asked a question he'd far rather lie to answer, but she'd asked it directly to the one person who knew for certain. He wouldn't lie.

“From the Titan Mythal killed.”

“Was it...sick?”

He shook his head, his shoulders slumped. "It was self defense, I think. A final venomous attack. The Evanuris discovered how to shape it to their will."

"And Andruil made weapons and armor of the Void," she paraphrased. "But it drove her mad, made a plague upon her lands and nearly destroyed the People until Mythal stole the knowledge of the Void from her. The Void most likely being the place where a dead Titan is...was?" He had closed his eyes as he nodded, as if he didn't want to see her face as she put this together fully. "No. Not Mythal. You. *You* took the knowledge from Andruil."

"Yes."

"Wait, lyrium is the blood of a living Titan. How does the blood of a dead one continue to spread and grow?"

"Ghilan'nain and Sylaise."

"They made it self-replicating."

"Yes."

"Why would they even do that?"

He finally looked back at her, his face so stripped of emotion that he was like a stranger. "Because Andruil could not get back to the Void. And June wanted it too. Sylaise would have done anything to keep him happy."

"Lyrium is addictive, the red stuff even more so. And Andruil was violently unhinged by then, I'm guessing, June not far behind her. It was easier to give in than to fight them both." He looked ashamed and she wondered how complicit he was in it all. *Andruil claimed him as he had angered her...* "How was your original plan supposed to work? Not the current one, but back then. The Veil as a defense always seemed...unfinished. Only part of the job, so to speak."

His expression was an interesting mix of pride that she knew that and despair that she'd figured it out. "I would have used the power of the orb to destroy the City, inside the Fade, with the Blight and the Evanuris within it."

"Would that have worked?"

"Theoretically."

"I walk the Din'anshiral. There is only death on this journey."

"You would have needed to be inside it." It wasn't a question. "The fallout would have been...catastrophic to the Fade, Solas." He wouldn't meet her eyes. She made a leap. "The spirits of the Fade knew that, didn't they? They agreed to it, because new spirits would be born from emotions and memories. That's what the Veil was for, to keep it contained so it didn't affect the waking world and thereby stop life from happening at all. It's either that or you were going to burn it all down and start it over. You would *become* the Maker."

"You know too much, Carly. Too much."

"You *need* me to if we're going to fix this. This isn't casually reshaping the reality of the last couple thousand years. This is...this is *all* of known history." It was impossible.

He shook his head and didn't speak. Then he climbed down the ladder and left the rotunda. She sat

on the crate, blankly staring at the unfinished mural and drank her cold cocoa.

Chapter End Notes

I suppose I would call this an exploration of a specific set of headcannons. I don't know that I actually believe them or hold them as some sort of gospel. It was a whole lot of speculation based on scraps of dialogue and lore mixed with some pure imagination. This chapter went through so many iterations before I settled on this one. So I would suggest it's like a world state, subject to change and not canon (obvs, it's an AU). Especially considering we don't know what the future holds for DA4. I know, I'm overthinking it.

Anyway, hope it was a good read, let me know what you think. And yes, go ahead and tell me how many of you immediately thought of a certain 80's song.

Final PS: OMG, 50K words!

In Harmony, Truth

Chapter Notes

6/16/20

Headcannon glitter, part 2. Another long chapter, although not as long as the last one.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Peaches,” Varric called to her across the courtyard.

“What's up, Varric?”

“You and Chuckles have another fight?”

“Not exactly. Why do you ask?” She was tired. She hadn't slept more than a wink, too worried, too pent up, and too afraid of what she'd see if she fell into the Fade. She'd hidden in her chamber until her stomach protested its emptiness and finally dragged herself down to the Keep to at least pretend everything was fine. The march on Adamant would be happening soon, she really needed to be getting ready for it. Hawke had already left to track Stroud, all Carly was waiting for was a meeting place and a time.

“He left the castle yesterday,” he said in a sardonic tone. “Hasn't been back.”

“How do you know that?”

He smirked, but it felt false. “I have my ways, Peaches. What happened?”

“Don't ask. It would take too long, and has too many spoilers in it. Where would he even go?”

“As much as that sounded rhetorical, he was headed towards that ruin lower on the mountain.”

She leaned in and kissed his forehead with a resounding smack. “You're the peach, my friend.”

“You need backup?”

“No. This...I don't want an audience for this.”

The path was not hard to find, although it was overgrown enough that it was hard to follow. It wasn't the Undercroft, it was deeper in the woods, forgotten and hiding. Probably originally a waystation for pilgrims on their way to the Golden City. She kept her bow nocked and ready, not sure what might lurk here in the thick forest under the shadow of Skyhold. Eventually, she found a cave. It was shallow but well concealed behind a fold of rock. She wouldn't have found it if not for the smell of wood smoke and the tingle of powerful wards. Holding up the Anchor, she crossed them and wondered not for the first time just how much of himself he'd put into it.

Solas was cross legged against the back wall of the cave, a heavy pelt over his shoulders, the ancient remains of a pallet under him. A waterskin and a bundle of food lay next to him. The fire

he'd built had burned out hours ago, leaving char and ash behind. Carly set about clearing it and building up a new fire. It might be mid-spring elsewhere in Thedas, but in the mountains it was still cold. The fire cast a cheerful light dancing around the space, across his pale face. He'd been asleep the whole time, she guessed. His lips were slightly blue and his eyes were sunken into his head. She tucked the fur closer around him – realizing it was a wolfskin with a quiet laugh – and settled down to wait for him to come back from his journey into the Fade.

Wake up, vhenan. Even in her head she knew she probably shouldn't have let it slip.

He took a slightly deeper breath, rising to the surface from his dreams. She stayed across the fire from him, watching him come back to consciousness. When his eyes opened, they were faint. She reached over and uncorked the waterskin before she handed it to him. He drank without looking at her for more than a second.

“Eat something too. You've been here almost a full day.”

He moved slowly, as if he'd aged overnight into an old man. She forced herself to just sit and wait. When he was ready, he would begin. She fed the fire, throwing more heat into the cave when she saw him shiver. Funny, he never seemed to feel the cold. Had walked who knew how many miles in bare feet like a Dalish, without complaint or even notice. But something had broken in him. The pretense, maybe.

“I did not expect you to come looking for me.”

“I know,” she replied. “Where did you go?”

“I walked in ancient memories, went deeper into the Fade than I have since waking from uthenera.”

Silence fell between them for a while as he collected himself. *Rebooting the system*, she thought with a faint smile. He frowned as he parsed that and she smiled more broadly, almost soothed by the fact that their bond remained and that he still cared to dip into her thoughts. A strange thing to be grateful for. She broke a limb of wood into pieces and laid them in a crosswise pattern on the fire before she spoke. Sparks flew up to the ceiling of the cave, reminding her of another night, months ago, where they spoke of truths.

“Do you remember asking me if I played chess and I said that I'd been known to dabble?”

“I do.”

“I kinda lied. As a kid, I played a lot. Never anything outstanding or newsworthy, but by my teens I could reliably win against both my father and my grandmother. In school, I played on the chess team and helped us to win a city wide competition.” She huffed a laugh at the thought of her younger self, naively ignorant of what waited for her in life.

Solas waited, his face patient and his posture easy against the back wall of the cave. If he was waiting for her to spring another mental trap on him, he was doing a good job of hiding it. She shuffled herself around a bit to get more comfortable. She barely even knew where she was going with this, but she knew for certain that if they were going to be a team moving forward, they had to have this conversation.

“After the masquerade, you said you were willing to listen if I had a better idea of how to help you, right?”

“I did.”

“Did you mean it?”

“Of course.”

“Okay, last seemingly random question: what is the plan as it currently stands?”

He was quiet for a few minutes, either trying to find a way to phrase it so she'd understand or arguing with himself over whether or not he should say it at all. She knew when he'd come to a decision; he sat up straighter and rummaged in the bag he'd brought with him for a loaf of bread. He tore it apart and offered her a chunk of it. She nibbled on it as he spoke.

“Once I regain my orb, the power stored within it should be sufficient to cross the Veil into the Fade and unravel the spell, letting the Veil fall.”

“Like a piece of cloth tugged off a table or like a film swept clear from a liquid surface?”

If he was surprised that she would visualize it that way, he didn't say so. “Neither. The Veil is...a harmonic. It disrupts the energy of the Fade to keep it separate from the waking world.”

“So...more like a sound wave kind of thing?” *I wonder if that's why it's called the Chant of Light.*

He nodded. “If you like. Without the Veil, the Fade will once again be present everywhere. The Fade reflects and is shaped by reality, which in turn...”

“Shapes reality as we know it,” she finished.

His mouth quirked. “I get the feeling you have had this conversation before in some form or other.”

“More or less.” She gestured with her hands, a wordless expression of a jumble. “Between knowing that spirits are formed from emotion and intent, that dreams can be shaped by mages who know how to do it and that Tranquility is a thing that exists in this world, it's not a big leap to make.”

“What does Tranquility have to do with it?” he asked, genuinely curious.

“The Avvar call Tranquil the 'dream-slain'. If you kill someone in the Fade, their physical body remains alive, just...Tranquil. One could assume the reverse is true. If you killed a sleeping physical body, while their mind is active in the Fade, their spirit would remain there. Right?”

“Potentially, if they were a Dreamer.”

“Like you.” He nodded and she sighed. “Okay, now we get to the tough part. There is something you say, at the end when you tell the Inquisitor your plans, that once the Veil is down, the world would burn in raw chaos and you could 'restore the world of your time, the world of the elves'. What does that mean exactly? Are we talking a metaphorical restoration or would you actually bring back Elvhenan like pulling something out of a box? Manipulation of time or just the fabric of reality?”

“Those are very pointed questions, Carly.”

“Yes, they are.”

“The answer is not that simple.” He held up a hand before she could interrupt with the frustration bubbling up. *Stop evading, Dread Wolf.* He smiled crookedly. “It is both, and neither. I cannot bring back the actual cities and lives that were lost with Elvhenan, but I *can* make it possible to rebuild them. Without proper barriers against the uprush of energy, the waking world would suffer

a tide of violence, presumably. All spirits would be freed, their natures unbound by limitation. It is reasonable to expect there would be conflict with the inhabitants of this world.”

“Everywhere, all at once, and by a population with no concept of seeing spirits as just another kind of person.”

“Correct.”

“Okay, so we're talking a potential battleground, rather than actual, *tangible* destruction of the world just by the nature of the energies.”

“Yes.”

“Okay,” she said again, pausing to process. “Is it just a matter of needing to prepare people to accept that spirits will suddenly appear en masse or...?”

“In order to prevent such chaos? It would be a vast undertaking. Humans in particular are varied in their beliefs, widespread and too used to holding the power to let it go willingly. You have seen it yourself. The Chantry initially refused any support for the Inquisition, regardless of the very real threat of the Breach, did it not?”

“Hmm, and mortal elves are no better. The Dalish hold *all* spirits as dangerous, like wild animals only fit to be hunted or avoided. City elves had their heritage beaten out of them by the Chantry.” He cocked his eyebrow and didn't disagree. “And dwarves have little concept of the Fade at all because they aren't connected to it. We won't even touch the Qunari. Fuck, this will be harder than I thought.”

“But you still wish to save them.”

“Of course I do. One person's life isn't worth more or less than another's simply because of their beliefs or ability. You sought freedom for your people. They didn't get it then, but there's no reason to think you can't give it to them now. Just more...diplomatically.”

“What are you suggesting? We politely ask for the elven lands back that were conquered by Orlais?”

She met his mockingly incredulous look with a serious one of her own. “That's not a bad idea once this is all over. They'll owe me big, you know. So will Tevinter, for getting rid of the monstrosity they created. Corypheus was a Magister, after all. Those are the two big nations to contend with, no one else really has a horse in the race for elven freedom.”

“And then what? I simply forego relinquishing the Veil?”

“Oh no, I think that still needs to come down. The Breach was made possible because it's already weakening. Certainly Corypheus didn't sacrifice a city's worth of lives for blood magic. The casualties of the Breach only happened *after* the explosion.” She thought of something else he once said in the game and sat forward, excitement piqued. “Would there be a way to make the Veil drop slowly, over time? There's a line you say, something about how Elvhen magics could linger for centuries, that they made symphonies of spells.”

She could just about see the wheels turn in his head as he thought about it. “It's...possible. I would need considerably more power than I have at my disposal now.”

“I mean, yeah, I know you need the orb back no matter what you do.”

He cocked his head at her and gave her a searching look. “Why are you doing this, why are you here?”

“Where else would I be?” *I'm in love with you, you idiot. I need to save you.*

Chapter End Notes

This chapter woke me out of a sound sleep at 2 in the morning. I actually had to get up and write this mess before it would let me go back to sleep. It hasn't been beta'd, so if you find mistakes, inconsistencies or any other problems, feel free to let me know. Feedback is forever the lifeblood of a writer.

Like You Mean It

Chapter Notes

6/19/20

Last bit of headcannon glitter for a while.

He seemed suddenly breathless and...*small*. She didn't like the thought of Solas as small. He was Fen'Harel, trickster god and clever usurper of the Blight. His plans might always go a little sideways...okay, a lot sideways...but sometimes sideways wasn't a bad thing. A mountain of mistakes had weighed heavy on him, and he'd carried it alone for a very long time. She'd correctly guessed exactly what it entailed. She knew what he wanted to do to fix it, which naturally assumed that more plans would potentially go sideways. Hers could too. And yet...

They would never have met if his plans had gone the way they were meant to.

"Do you really mean that?" he asked, very softly. *Afraid*.

"That I love you?" Her heart was racing. It was a wonder he couldn't hear it in the small confines of the cave. She swallowed the lump of anxiety at facing this subject finally and kept her eyes on his. She erected a hasty shield of snark. "Duh. C'mon, you've been able to read my mind since I got in this world, Solas. You already knew."

"Knowing it and hearing it are different." He hadn't fallen for the snark. If anything, his expression grew...tender.

"*You change...everything*." Knowing that he felt that way and hearing him say it, even if it was in the Fade, had made a huge difference. She hadn't been willing to take Cole's word as gospel on it, she'd needed to hear Solas say it himself. "That's...fair."

The silence that fell then wasn't fraught with the same kind of tension as before and she went to distract herself with the chunk of bread only to find that she'd managed to shred it into crumbs while they talked. Solas snorted and handed her another piece.

"You said you went deeper into the Fade than you had since waking. What did you find there?" The question made one side of his mouth tick up again, almost a smile. As if he simply couldn't help appreciating that she always asked. *Question asked, Solas slightly approves*.

"I found...myself." She waited. This had always been the hard part for him, to accept how much she knew, to trust her ability to understand. Even now. "A younger me, so full of hope and promise. Mischievous and rebellion." He shook his head slowly. "So full of anger and hurt. Waking in this world was..."

"Like waking to a world full of Tranquil." They shared a smirk, having discussed that already. "You made the Veil here, didn't you? Tarasyl'an Tel'as. And then slept here, in this spot."

"You don't need me to answer that."

She smiled gently. "They got some aspects right about you, you know. In the game. The

melancholy, the hurt. The lies by omission. The loneliness.” She sat back and let the fire warm her feet. “More dread, not enough rebel. Certainly not enough truth. But anyone looking knew where to tease it out and find it. There's a whole section of the game, after Corypheus is defeated and you've disappeared, where the player follows the clues. Unravels the Dread Wolf's riddle.”

“And then?”

“Then the player finds you. Right there, at the very end. And you explain everything. Well, a good chunk of everything. You talk about a war, how generals became gods. And how you locked them away, created the Veil, destroyed the elves because they were separated from their connection to the Fade. You talk about having to end the world that *is* to replace it with the world that *was*. It's heartbreaking. For someone...a *character* who's in love with you, it's harder still. Because you won't let her help. Won't let her see what you become. You take her trust in you, but you never offer your own back. You leave her with a kiss and promise to never forget her. You never tell her why, either. I only put it together because I like the lore. And there's a lot of it.”

“And now you are here, and it's real.”

She looked across the fire to him, mirroring the nearly mournful expression he wore. “Yeah. I don't want that scenario to happen, Solas. Not just for myself, but for you. Once you were a spirit of Wisdom, weren't you, made flesh and twisted into Pride. Compelled and sworn to the service of Mythal, and I'm guessing, raised to godhood status for that service. And I'm also guessing that part of that service was an ability like Cole's. To make people forget. Fen'Harel came later, you said. When you rebelled against the others. A badge of honor you reclaimed from an insult, to strike fear in your enemies' hearts and hope in your friends. My last guess is that before the Rebel, and aside from Pride, there was another name for you.”

“Fen'Ghilen,” he whispered after a long pause. She let it sink into her, knowing she was the first person to hear it spoken in thousands upon thousands of years. *The Guiding Wolf*. It fit.

“Where does this leave us now?” She felt like they'd had this conversation before. He must have been reminded of it too, since he gave her a crooked grin.

“It leaves us with making a new plan for the end of the world.”

“Easy peasy, huh?”

“If you like.”

She shook her head at him. “Seriously, where do we go from here?”

“We defeat Corypheus, mend the sky. Get my orb back, preferably with my magic still inside it. And then...”

“Then we work out a way to safeguard the elves and bring down the Veil. Solas?” She waited for him to focus back on her from whatever reverie had taken him. “How will the Evanuris fit into all this?”

His face was rueful. “I should have guessed you would not forget them.”

“No, I wouldn't. They're a big part of this mess, hand in hand with the Blight. The whole reason you did all this. I feel like it's kinda important to know what you're going to do there.”

“My original plan is still an option.”

“Not one I want to think about. You'll die.”

“I walk the Din'nanshiral, there is only death on this journey. You think about that line a lot, you know.”

“Surely you can see why.” Just hearing him say it made her shudder with fear for him. “I don't...I don't want that to become a reality.”

“I was once capable of such magic that it changed the world. With enough strength, I could do so again.”

“They sleep, masked in a mirror,” she quoted. “Would it be as simple as just...smashing the Elvuians?”

“Yes and no. Their prisons are no ordinary conduit pathway. They are tied both to the Fade and to myself. It was the only way to ensure they would remain there. As long as I live, they are contained.”

She thought about all the times he'd nearly died in the field and her blood ran cold. He nodded wryly, seeing it on her face. “Shit, that makes me never want to take you anywhere, ever again.”

“I am no weakling,” he said, mildly affronted. “I have had many years to contemplate their fates. It is more merciful to end it quickly, without waking them. They are all beyond saving, twisted as they are from the Blight and their own madness for power.”

“And have you come up with a way to be merciful?”

“Several. All of them require more power than I have.”

“Solus, if the Fade reflects reality, and you, a Dreamer, can shape the Fade....isn't it as simple as believing you can do it, so you can?”

“Magic does not work that way.”

“No, but spirits do. And you're still a lot more like a spirit than you give yourself credit for.” She watched his face change, as if it had never occurred to him. *Mind over matter*. “You sure carried a lot of hopes for your people, but none for yourself. I guess I'll have to do it for you.”

He let out a bark of laughter that was nearly a sob. “You have such faith in me. Why?”

“Because I know you're not a monster, and you *do* mean to set this world right. And I believe you can do it.”

“Mythal would have loved you. Your compassion is unequalled.”

“Maybe. I'll probably get to find out.” She gave a choked laugh in return. “She'll show up sooner or later. You might be surprised at some of the changes in her, though.” She tapped her forehead.

“Do you know what this is?”

“Do you?” he retorted, the barest glimmer of humor showing.

“Stop being so literal, yes, obviously I know the vallaslin were originally slave markings. I meant this image.”

“Even if I did, it does not explain why you would wear that likeness on your face.”

“Because you are *not* alone anymore, Solas. I drew this in the other world, wore it on the face of every Lavellan I played, because I wanted to carry your burdens with you. As long as *I* live, you will not be alone again. Every single one of those characters loved you, and told you so before you walked away from her. They were all me. No matter what comes, I know the truth about you. All of it, good, bad and ugly. I will not turn away, and I will not give up on you. Yes, I have faith in you.”

A single tear broke the dam on his face. She couldn't stand it anymore and crossed the cave, wrapping herself around him in his lap, burrowing under the wolf pelt to hold him. The outpouring was harsh and agonizing, but she stayed strong, held his head against her breast and let him purge the emotion like a wall holding back a crashing wave. He clung to her, his hands clenched against her back, his wracking sobs vibrating through her like physical blows. She tightened her arms on him, tears rolling down her own cheeks.

Letting the steam out won't stop the boiling, but it releases the pressure so you can deal with it, she thought. He'd kept that pressure inside too long. Thousands of years too long.

He finally quieted, the anguish nothing more than shuddering breaths. She tipped up his face and kissed the tears off his cheeks, fingers still wrapped around his head, cradling it like he was precious. “No more,” she whispered. “Don't run from me, don't hold back from me.”

“Ar lath ma, vhenan.”

She pressed a soft kiss to his lips and smiled. “I know.” He shuddered under her touch, his eyes slipping closed and his hands still bunched at her back. She kissed him again, just as gentle. “Ar lath ma, ma fen. I'll never stop. Through everything. I mean that. Now, it is time to come home.”

The Night Watch and the Morning Sun

Chapter Notes

6/23/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Skyhold was quiet when they returned cold, worn out and stumbling. Well, Carly was anyway. Solas held her hand as they hiked back up the mountain, his grip firm and supportive when she lagged on tired feet, although he was silent. That was all right, she never minded silence with him. They entered the lower courtyard and she nodded to the guards on duty, listening to the thump of the portcullis closing behind them. She wondered what Varric had told the others, since she'd been gone for hours and no one was there anxiously waiting for her return.

“Are you all right?” she asked Solas before turning towards the keep itself.

He took a steadying breath and looked up at the stars. She followed his gaze, startled as ever that none of the constellations were what she expected. He'd been teaching them to her, but she never remembered them all. She was fairly certain they both knew it was an exercise in futility, but it gave them an excuse to snuggle up together under the stars. Which sounded like a very good idea at the moment.

“Come with me,” she said, tugging his hand. He followed without comment.

She closed and bolted the door to her chamber before they went up the last flight of stairs. Then he just stood there, a curious expression on his face as he looked over her private space where so little of the woman he knew was reflected. She went about her nighttime routine, stowing her bow, kicking off her boots. Screw the barefoot Dalish nonsense. When she reached to pull the pins from her hair, his hands were already there. It was longer now, falling halfway down her back. She'd started wearing it up, keeping it off her face and out of her way. It drove her crazy. But her reward was this, his strong fingers kneading her scalp. Serenity floated down over both of them as he worked every snarl loose and moved his hands from her head to her neck, soothing the tight muscles there.

“Ma serannas,” he whispered.

“For what?”

“The gift of your compassion.” She leaned back on him, pulled his arms around her in a backwards hug. “And your love.”

“You've been without it a long time, Solas. I mean to change that.”

He chuckled, rusty but genuine. “You mean to change a lot of things.”

“I do.”

“You are exhausted.”

“I am,” she agreed. But she turned in his arms instead of finishing up her bedtime preparations. She

pushed the wolf skin off his shoulders, letting it drop to the floor. He raised an eyebrow at her and she just smirked at him. He didn't stop her from lifting the jawbone from his neck, tilting his head so it cleared his ears without catching. She looped it over her hand and reached for the slender belt he always wore to keep his sweater in place. She let that drop onto the pelt. "Stay with me?"

The barest flicker of heat kindled in his eyes and he stepped back from her to pull his sweater over his head. He unlaced the leather shirt he wore under it, leaving it to hang open as he watched her bite her lip. "I thought you were tired."

"I am, but that doesn't mean I can't enjoy the view." She cupped his cheek. "I want to know you're here. I want to reach out in my sleep and hold you close, and not in the Fade. You've spent enough time there today."

He took her hand and kissed her palm, shaking his head ruefully. "You never cease to surprise me."

"That's not a bad thing," she said lightly. "Keeps the mystery alive."

He huffed under his breath. Then he pulled her shirt free of her pants, gathering up the material and bringing it over her head in a single motion. She dropped her own hands to her waistband, loosening the ties so they slipped off her hips. She kicked them away and stood there in just her smallclothes, suddenly much more nervous. She hadn't thought this all the way through. But she'd never been a coward, and she reached behind her back for the clasp of the breastband. He stopped her.

"Don't. Not yet. Tonight is for rest. There is plenty of time for everything else."

"Okay." Then he ruined that sentiment by stripping completely naked. *Oh, unfair.* He grinned at her as she looked her fill of his long lines and lean muscles and stark tattoos. She took a swat at him. "You're a tease, Fen'Harel."

"I will do plenty of it later. For now, let me just hold you, vhenan."

They got into the bed, and curled up together like they'd done it a hundred times, two peas in a large pod. Her arm draped across his stomach, the long scar under her hand. She traced the edges of it idly. He was observing her, she noticed. "I'm not sure I want to ask where you got it."

"I think you know already. Details don't matter."

"That's true enough." She settled against his chest, his arm wrapped around her. He doused the torches with a flick of his fingers, making her giggle as the room was plunged into deep, soft darkness. The breastband pressed on her uncomfortably. "Oh, fuck it," she muttered and leaned up on her elbow to unhook it and throw it off the side of the bed. "No peeking."

"Of course not," he agreed lightly, and she knew full well he was lying, especially since the backs of his fingers traced up her ribs to brush against the underside of her breast. But then she noticed that while he was touching, he wasn't looking. His eyes remained on hers as she took a shaky breath and shivered deliciously under his fingers.

"Oh, I see how it is, malicious compliance. I guess I need to be more specific." He laughed, rich and full. She shook her head and laid back down against him. Pressed skin to skin, they warmed each other. She drifted ever closer to sleep, the feel of him more of a comfort than she expected. She'd wanted to comfort *him*, and never imagined how much she needed it in return. He was so *real* against her, she didn't want to miss a moment of it.

He pulled her leg over his, entwining them more fully, and kissed the top of her head. "Sleep."

"I'm trying."

His chest shook with suppressed laughter. "No, you are fighting it. Close your eyes now, and sleep."

"Will you?"

"Perhaps. For now I am content." She smiled against his skin and did as she was told.

In the morning, he was still there, curled around her as she lay on her side facing him. His breath teased through her hair, brushing over her forehead. She opened her eyes and tipped her head back to see him looking at her. The sun pouring in through the tall windows splashed light across his face, highlighting the strands of blue and even faint violet amid the silver in his eyes.

"Good morning. Did you sleep at all?"

He pressed a kiss to her brow. "No. I watched you instead."

"If you weren't so adorable, that would be creepy."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "I am nearly ten thousand years old. I am *not* adorable."

She snuggled up to reach and kissed his lips, nipping the bottom one between her teeth the way she'd always wanted to. "You are so adorable, I can't even stand it."

He made a noise somewhere between a grunt and a growl and pushed her back into the pillows. He rose above her, shifting his weight on top of her and pinning her down. She wrapped her legs around him and crossed her ankles on his back. He gave her a look of pure lust and kissed her hard, stealing her breath.

He pushed his hips into hers, and she could feel the unmistakable evidence of his interest against her smalls. She moaned a muffled sound into his mouth and he pulled back, almost startled at himself. "We shouldn't."

"Mm, yes we should."

He smiled down at her, and leaned on his elbows, resting comfortably in the cradle of her thighs. He traced along her hairline with a single finger, dropping down to follow the lines of her vallaslin. "All right, yes, we should. But not now. It would not do to have the Inquisitor so out of sorts."

"Oh?" She ran her hands down his back, tickling his sides. He scowled and wrestled with her for her hands, a smile playing around his lips as he fought to keep back a laugh. "And just how would I be out of sorts?"

"Well...you would likely be highly distracted," he replied, kissing her again lightly. "And tired. And perhaps...just perhaps..." He moved down her neck, nipping and kissing the length of it. "You might not wish to ride any horses."

His teeth closed on her skin where her neck met her shoulder and it was her turn to squirm in his arms. "Solas!" she gasped to the echo of his teasing laugh. "Promises, promises, ma fen."

“I will make it up to you. *That* I do promise. But now we should face the day.”

“You're a spoilsport.”

He kissed her one last time, hard and passionate. “I am known for my mischief, vhenan.”

Chapter End Notes

Full props to whoever it was who first made the 'we shouldn't, we should' meme. It was too good not to borrow.

Paved With Good Intentions

Chapter Notes

6/26/20

Ugh...Adamant.

Carly had a pretty simple plan for not getting caught in the whole crashing through a walkway into the Abyssal Rift, and for a while it worked. If she stayed on the ground, there was nowhere to fall. Simple logic. Granted that didn't work too well as she cleared the battlements for her troops, avoiding the weakening blasts from the corrupted dragon, but the *idea* was sound. Then Hawke fought her way through a knot of demons and addled Wardens and raced up the stairs towards the precarious bridge above.

"Wait!" Carly shouted after her. "Come back here!"

"I'm gonna get that Venatori scum, spit him on his own staff and roast him like a nug," Hawke hollered back, barely audible over the fighting. "For Bethany!"

And then she was out of sight.

No no no no no...

She should have known how strongly Hawke would react to the Wardens feeling the Calling only to find out it was a plot by Corypheus to subvert them. She shouldn't have brought her here at all.

"Varric, my dearest, darlingest friend, this is *exactly* what I was hoping to avoid," she snarled as she took on another set of demons with her bow, the arrows flying true after all the months of practice she'd had.

Bianca twanged out in triplets and he didn't answer, although she saw his face go pale and his jaw clench. They finished up the demons and he rotated his shoulders to loosen his spine. "I'll get her back."

"The dragon!" Dorian called and Carly spun around to see it coming just as Varric went up the stairs. She heard the thin scream of Clarel as it snatched her up and heard Hawke's battle cry as she attacked Erimond.

"Fuck. Solas?"

"You can't go up there."

"I have to. They're going to fall, and if I'm not there, they'll die in the fucking *bottomless canyon*. If I'm there..."

He got in her face, took her arm in a tight, painful grip. His features were twisted with too much knowledge of what she would do. An undercurrent of worry – or outright fear – laced the expression and for just a moment she was transfixed by it. "Then you'll end up in the Fade, which you absolutely did not want to do."

She set her jaw, pushing his concern aside. She would *not* allow her friends to die. Not like this. “And I'll get us out too.”

“Carly...”

She took off, her feet hammering up the stairs two at a time, Solas on her heels, still shouting at her to stop. She ignored him. The dragon crawled over Clarel's prone body, advancing on Hawke and Varric who weren't paying attention as they wrestled with Erimond. The Warden made her final play, and the half bridge exploded, throwing the pair of them up into the air before they began to fall.

“*NO!*” she screamed, racing to the edge and jumping blindly off it behind them even as it broke apart around her. She held out the Anchor, wondering in that brief moment how anyone had expected a game play version of this would work. How did anyone even have the time to think up something like this in all the chaos? She focused like she did when she closed rifts, but in the opposite direction. *C'mon, c'mon, open!*

The air below them ripped apart like a maw, and the rift she made swallowed them whole.

They were falling forever, it felt like. And then they weren't. The landing wasn't anything like the game. Hawke and Varric were in a tangle and she fell flat on her face. She got to her hands and knees and Solas offered his hand to help her up.

“I didn't think you were still right behind me.”

“The bridge *exploded*. And I was *not* going to let you *kill* yourself with this madness without me.” He was nearly snarling and it shocked her so hard she didn't keep a lid on her thoughts.

Was that because you love me or because you don't want to lose your mark? He glared at her, offended and incensed. She knew better than to take it personally in the moment. They were in the Fade, where their every emotion would shape the environment around them. She had to stay calm, the way he always did. Drawing out the denizens of this little corner wasn't on the agenda.

“Don't mind me, brain's a little fried.” She straightened out her back, stretching and making sure she wasn't hurt. “Congratulations, love, you're in the Fade.”

He looked around, still scowling at her errant mental remarks, but that was passing quickly to fascination. She felt a wry smile twist her lips. Yeah, some things were true to form. “This is not any part of the Fade I am familiar with.”

“Nightmare realm. The demon in charge here is an ugly motherfucker. It's been feeding on people's fears of the Blight since time immemorial. But that's okay. We aren't going to be facing it because we're not staying.” She took a look around herself, found her gaze drawn upwards into the greenish gloom to find the Black City hovering on the edge of her perception, weightless in the false sky. She shuddered. How had he done it? How much raw power did it take to rip the earth apart and make it physical in another mostly *ephemeral* realm? And then on top of it, he'd built a permanent barrier between the waking world and here. No wonder he'd slept for thousands of years.

“And how do you propose we leave?” he asked, drawing her back.

She held up her hand. “It should work both ways.”

He took her hand in his, stepping close so he could speak softly. “You do not know that. Even I don't know that.”

“Only one way to find out. Our only other option is to go out through Erimond's rift, and with just the four of us, we'd never make it. I might need some boosting, though.” She met his eyes. He didn't look pleased at the possibility of having his identity revealed. “How long did you think you could hide it from them? At least it's only Varric and Hawke, and neither of them are going to say anything. You're the Fade mage, of course you know how to help me get us out of here. And once we get back, we'll be too busy getting ready for the final assault to worry about it.”

His facial expression indicated that he thought she may have a point even if he didn't like it. “It will be so soon?”

“Yeah. It's almost over.” She dusted herself off and took a glance around. There were similarities to the game version, but not many. If anything, this place was darker, drearier. And the smell was awful. Sharp and stale simultaneously. For a moment she was sorrowed by the thought of those dreams she couldn't fix, but she knew it was far more important that they escape unscathed. “I'm sorry it's such a sucky location, but go ahead and look your fill. I don't have any intention of staying here.” She left his side to see to the others. “You guys okay?”

“Ya know, Peaches, when you said...”

“Yeah, I know what I said. You remember what I promised?”

“That it wasn't going to happen,” he said, pouting at her. She gave him a hand up and clapped his shoulder.

“Yeah, well, best laid plans of mice and men...” She hauled Hawke to her feet too. “I guess I'm not as good as I thought I was.”

“I warned you about meddling with shit.”

“You did. I also said no one was gonna die on my watch. And they won't. I'm gonna get us home.”

“How, exactly?” Hawke asked. “For that matter, how did we even get here?”

“I opened a rift. It was either that or let the two of you fall to ignominious death at wherever the bottom of the Abyssal Rift is.” She shook her head. “Not a good look for anyone. Still want to bitch at me, Varric?”

Hawke snorted, and that startled Varric out of his foul mood. “All right, fine. You saved our asses...sort of.”

“O ye of little faith.”

“We aren't home yet.”

“Okay, that's fair.”

“If you are finished squabbling,” Solas called to them. “I think we should make our departure. There are murmurs here. Our presence has been detected.”

“I'm not interested in meeting these particular neighbors in real life, so let's get this show on the road. I should probably open it on level ground, right? Then we can just walk through.”

“With no idea where we will end up,” Solas pointed out severely. He was scowling now at her flippant tone.

“It beats staying, Solas.”

“You are right.” He sighed. “Carly...I have concerns.”

“Duly noted.” She did too. Opening the rift had been more than a little painful, and her flippancy was a desperate attempt to hide it. Opening another one so soon was going to be agony, even if he could lend her strength. She knew why, of course. The Anchor was poisoning her, unraveling the warp and weft of her flesh, made worse by whatever nuclear option Corypheus had unlocked in it when he tried to take it. *The Mark of the Rift*. Didn't matter that she tried not to use it much, it was still a powerful portion of the Anchor that built up over time, needing to be expended if she wasn't going to do even more damage to herself. Sooner or later she would have to start thinking about what would happen when it was gone.

Time enough for that later, she thought, blocking out Solas's sudden start and stare at her. No doubt he'd caught what she was thinking. *Now it's time to go home*.

“Shall we?”

She didn't wait for them to respond, just took a steadying breath, held out her hand and concentrated. Pain whipped up her arm from her fingertips to her elbow and she winced but didn't stop. The Fade rippled, slowly at first, then parted just enough for them to maybe slide through one at a time. It wouldn't be enough; even she could hear the whispers as wisps and spirits closed in on their location. She knew demons wouldn't be far behind, the scuttling kind from the start of the game, because of course the Fade reflected what one was thinking. There were too many similarities here for her to think of anything else.

Ma fen, a little help?

He cupped her arm from behind, and strength poured into her like filling a glass from a waterfall. She felt like she might burst from it and swallowed the cry that crawled up her throat. But the rift widened, growing as tall as they were.

“Go, go!” she shouted. Hawke and Varric ran through the rift and she and Solas walked together towards it, with him still supporting her weight. More and more of it with each step as she struggled to keep the rift open. The effort made her grind her teeth and a growl of pain was working its way loose in her throat now. He pushed more of his power into her and it escaped. She screamed, losing focus on keeping the tear in the Veil open.

They stumbled through the rift as it closed around them, and the last thing she saw was sand.

After the Fall

Chapter Notes

6/30/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She jolted awake in Solas's arms. "What?"

"You and I are going to have a serious discussion when this is over," he said, menacingly low, putting one foot solidly in front of the other. Under normal circumstances angry, protective Solas would have turned her into a puddle, but since she already felt like one, she couldn't properly appreciate it.

Don't need to, she thought, loud enough for him to hear. *I did what I had to do, and I'll do it again. And when the time comes, you'll take it back and I'll live.*

"Maimed," he growled through clenched teeth, echoing what she'd said the very moment they met. Evidently he hadn't forgotten. She noticed Varric and Hawke giving them a wide berth as he carried her back towards the fortress, looming over them tucked on the edge of the abyss. At least the sounds of fighting had stopped. The evidence of the siege was everywhere.

She snorted. She'd long resigned herself to the fact that regardless of whose plan succeeded, she was going to lose her arm. She knew this. She was oddly detached from the knowledge, no pun intended to herself.

"This was not my intention."

"No, your original intention was to wipe us all off the face of the world anyway, so what did it matter?" she snapped. She was rattled still, the pain remaining intense in her arm. She cradled it close to her chest and tried to smooth the frazzled edges of her nerves. "Ir abelas."

I didn't mean it that way, nor do I think you still mean to kill us all on a whim. I'm tired and my arm hurts. A lot.

He stopped walking and looked down at her in his embrace. "Vhenan, if I could take this pain from you, I would. I hope you know that."

"Hey, c'mere." He ducked his head and met her quick kiss. "I know that. I'm just cranky. Pay no attention to the noise in my head. I have one more rift to seal, and then this part is over. I just need to get through that, okay?"

He nodded and started walking again.

"You can put me down, you know. I can walk." A ghost of a smile creased his lips. "You *like* this, don't you? My knight in shining armor...well, not yet. Ooh, I can't wait to see you in that armor."

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, I think you know. You must have it stashed somewhere. All gleaming and gold and Elvhen.

All dolled up with fur and more buckles than it strictly needs to be functional. It's a *very* good look for you. Those gloves must be a bitch though."

"How do you even know..."

"Trespasser DLC."

"I have no idea what that means."

"DLC – downloadable content. Extra bits after the end. It's what you're wearing when the player finds you again. It's hot."

"Vhenan, why is it that whenever I carry you, you are a trial to my patience?"

She giggled at him, the lighter mood washing away her crankiness. "I dunno, love. Must be my rebellious nature." He gave her side eye. Real, legitimate side eye and she cackled. When she was done laughing she pushed at him until he put her back on her feet. "I promise you can carry me around all you want later, how's that sound?"

"Like it will try your patience," he said, slowly coming around to her mood swing.

"In a good way or a bad way?" she teased, cocking her head at him. She was thoroughly enjoying the seductive quality in his voice and had frankly forgotten everything around them as she reveled in it.

"I suppose that will depend on your perspective."

"Hey, lovebirds, we're here," Varric said, passing them and readying Bianca.

"Guess we'll have to save the rest of playtime for later." She got up on her tiptoes and kissed the cleft in his chin, then followed Varric and Hawke back into the fortress. She had guessed correctly – or luckily, and she had never been one to knock luck – and bringing them back to the waking world had put them somewhere in the dunes outside the fortress itself.

"You're late," Dorian said when they arrived where the rift pulsed green and crystalline in the night air. He looked utterly drained, and she wondered how many things had pursued them through this rift while they made their getaway from another one.

"Had an unplanned detour. Sorry." She took a breath and held up her aching arm. She gritted her teeth and forced herself to push the extruded bit of the Fade back where it belonged, sucking up the remaining demons with it. Even though it was easier than opening one, she was sweating and nauseous from the pain by the time the courtyard was empty of anything that shouldn't be there. She already missed the strength Solas had lent her, but of course he couldn't do that here, where so many eyes were on them. She looked at her hand and saw the edges of the Anchor had split and her palm was filling with stinging blood.

"Now we must decide what will happen to the Wardens." She looked up at Stroud, who glared thunderously at his fellows as he spoke.

"How many are corrupted by Corypheus?" she asked.

"Too many." He was still glaring. She was sorry she hadn't gotten to spend much time with him. A quick meeting with Hawke, plus a single battle, hadn't been enough. The game had nothing on his real life sense of honor. She also knew the schism that was coming for the Wardens would need him at the helm to keep it from turning to all out war.

“Then they should be separated and confined. Go back to Weisshaupt, Stroud. Get some fresh eyes and ears. And hands. Purge it thoroughly and rebuild here. We can't afford to not have a Warden presence in Orlais.” To her side she saw Solas stiffen and gave him a quick look. *We need them. We still need them.* He didn't like it, but he didn't object other than the expected laborious and exaggerated sigh. Stroud nodded slowly, accepting the Inquisition's decision. “I'm going home. I need...need to...ah shit...”

The world swirled around her again and she felt herself falling. Familiar arms gathered her up before the blackness won and she sank into blissful unconsciousness knowing he had her.

She woke in her own bed.

Which was mildly disturbing, considering how far away from Skyhold they had been. That was several days' travel that she had no memory of. The chamber was dark, the torches spent or never lit to begin with. The moon shone out on the balcony, which she could see since the doors were open, letting in a cool breeze. Her hand had been bandaged and she was dressed in a simple pair of soft leggings and a loose shirt. It was not hers. Guess she didn't have to wonder who managed that.

With a groan, she rolled out of the bed and visited the tidy bathroom in her chamber where stacks of barrels used to be. On her way back, she saw a mug of something that smelled sweet and tasted strongly of herbs on her nightstand. It was cold, but refreshing enough that she drank it all down before stumbling to the balcony doors. Solas stood looking out over the mountains. Her feet barely whispered on the stone and he just about jumped out of his skin when she tucked herself against his back, her arms around his waist. “Not often anyone gets the drop on you, ma fen.”

“I was...wandering, I guess.” His hands covered hers. “How are you feeling?”

“Like I got dragged backwards off the end of a cart.”

“That is...descriptive.”

“This whole fainting like a damsel bullshit is getting old. Hey, did you undress me just to dress me again?”

“Perhaps.”

“That's cheating.”

He turned away from the view and wrapped her up in his embrace, tucking her head under his chin so he could run his fingers through her hair. “I only changed your shirt and pants.”

She looked up at him and grinned. “I'm teasing.”

He kissed the end of her nose. “I see.”

“C'mere, I want a proper kiss.”

He pulled her in tight and kissed her like he had in the Fade, teeth and tongue, his hands roving down her back. She hummed into his mouth and he lifted her up by her ass and backed her against the door frame. She clung to him, arms around his neck, legs around his waist.

She was panting when she came up for air. “You like that I'm so tiny, don't you?”

“It has its finer moments.” He shifted his weight against her and moved flush into the apex of her thighs. His lean body was hard against her and she bit her lip. The look in his eyes darkened and turned serious. “Carly...ar lath ma. Do not do that again.”

“Which part?”

His brows drew together and something like anger crossed his face. “The part where you needlessly throw yourself into mortal danger, and then disregard my concern for it.”

No, that was fear.

“Solas, I’m the Inquisitor, throwing myself into mortal danger is my job.” She cupped his face in her hands, keeping his eyes on hers when he would have looked away. “And thoughts you overhear that are not spoken aloud should not be taken as truth. I know some pretty terrible secrets about you, things you’ve done, things you planned to do. And even with all that I know, I love you, ma fen, and because I love you, I trust you with my life. I did not disregard your concern, I just couldn’t stop or I would never have gotten the job done.”

“Hawke should not have...”

“Hawke didn’t know why she shouldn’t go up there. I didn’t tell her. I shouldn’t have taken her with us at all, but there was no good reason to keep her here. Varric would never have forgiven me anyhow. Solas, look at me.” She waited for his eyes to reach hers again, and for the rising tide of his temper to die down. She smiled at him, her thumbs brushing his cheekbones. “It all worked out. No one died. No one was lost. We made it home.”

“And you expended energy you do not have to spare to do it. Don’t think I don’t know this.”

“I did,” she agreed. “Because it needed to be done. And I leaned on you for help, because I knew you could give it.” She held up her bandaged hand. “The Anchor connects us. It will until you take it from me. And until you do, I will use it as I see fit, for the good of all of us. Got it?”

“So irrepressibly hopeful, my little Dalish.”

“Yup. And *all* yours. Now,” she wiggled in his arms, “what are you going to do about that?”

He grinned more wickedly than she’d ever seen on him, and carried her inside.

Chapter End Notes

waggles eyebrows Guess what happens next?

What Is the Old Dalish Curse?*

Chapter Notes

7/3/20

Y'all have waited a long time for this. *insert gameshow host voice* It's NSFW!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Solas set her on her feet next to the bed, his hands still on her hips, the loose shirt flowing over his wrists. He simply gazed at her for a moment and she looked up at him, wondering what he was waiting for.

“Something the matter?” she asked.

“No, nothing is wrong. You simply fill me with wonder. It has been many years since anyone looked at me the way you do.”

“That's very sad, ma fen.”

“Or perhaps it is only right.” He leaned down and kissed her once. “My beautiful vhenan, the avenging spirit of compassion. I have waited long years, without knowing, for someone like you. Were you always this way?”

"Has the Anchor changed you? Your morals, your...spirit?" She quirked a lopsided grin at him as he picked up the thought in her head. It widened as she saw chagrin at asking such a thing dawn on his face. *"I don't think so."* She held a hand to his chin, keeping his eyes on hers. “Having the Anchor only gave me a way to get in your head.” She chuckled. “Being kind for the sake of it is good for the soul. It's never worth being anything else when kindness and compassion are free.”

He kissed her harder as his response and her arms lifted to wrap around his neck. She let out a muffled noise as he pressed her close to him, his hands moving under the shirt to her skin. The sweep of his fingers made goosebumps rise and she shivered in his arms. “Are you cold?”

“With you? Never.” She cupped the back of his head to guide him back to her lips. She could kiss him forever and never get enough. But there was more and she wanted it. She whispered, “Ar isala ma. Take me to bed, Solas.”

He lifted the shirt over her head, his hands smoothing over her shoulders and down her sides when it was on the floor. He didn't stop kissing her as he unhooked the catches of her breastband and she let her arms drop so it fell off. She closed her eyes while his touch roved over her, cupping her breasts, pinching her nipples lightly, earning himself a hissing sound that made him laugh through his nose. She pulled at his sweater, feverishly impatient for his skin to be on hers. He was no less impatient, tearing at his clothes in an effort to hurry the process.

Then he knelt at her feet, his gaze sliding up the length of her body with such heat that she flushed under it. He placed a kiss on her belly, drawing a whimper from her that made him grin. He brushed his lips against her skin, moving from belly to hip, peeling away the cotton leggings to expose more and more of her, taking her smalls with them. She didn't know how exactly she was

still standing. He nipped her hip, soothed it with his tongue, then did it again, following the line of her pelvic bone until his breathed blew hot against the center of her. Her body clenched involuntarily.

He pushed the leggings to her ankles and let her keep her balance on his shoulder as he lifted each foot in turn to draw them off. His mouth was on her again, running up her calf, hands braced on the backs of her thighs. He traced the curve of her knee with his tongue, moving steadily higher up her leg as it dropped back to the floor. She was going to combust, she knew it. Or fall on his face. Or something...

“Solas...”

“Hush, vhenan.”

He placed a chaste kiss right against her mound and she held her breath to wait for whatever he had planned next, anticipation thrumming through her in time with her pulse. His hands pulled her legs apart so she stood wider and his tongue sneaked between them. She gasped again and she was sure he could feel her tremble. His hands slid higher on her legs, cupping her backside and pulling her open. She grabbed hold of his shoulders to stay upright. He ghosted his breath against her and she dug her nails into him. If he kept doing that, her biggest fear now, aside from falling, was that she'd drip on him.

“I can't...can't stay standing...” she panted.

He didn't answer, but merely slid his fingers closer to where she wanted them. He flicked the end of his tongue against her just as his fingertips brushed her slick. *Wobble wobble*, she thought. *I'm seriously going to fall.*

All at once he lifted her, landing her on her back on the bed. He hadn't even stopped torturing her with his mouth while he did it, following the trajectory of her body falling. He lifted one leg over his shoulder and spread her wide. He licked up her slick, from opening to clit, with the flat of his tongue and she bucked, crying out. He murmured under his breath, Elvish words she didn't catch. It wasn't an endearment and her body flushed with heat, thinking it might be something a bit...*earthier*.

He feasted on her, little flicks and licks that made her burn. Long, slow tastes that made her ache for completion. Her inner muscles spasmed, empty and longing. “Solas, please...”

“Not yet.”

Please, God, please I need to be filled. I need you to fill me with something...

Even before the thought had finished, his fingers sought entry to her heat, sliding slowly into her, giving her respite from his teasing. He sank to his knuckles, his tongue still against her bud and she arched into it, desperate for more.

“Is that better?” he murmured, his voice vibrating against her.

Curl them, she thought, knowing she couldn't speak. He did and her brain lapsed into gibberish, a litany of obscenities she could never say aloud. He pumped his hand against her, inside her. She came apart in a flash, imploding on his fingers and tongue with a loud cry. The aftershocks were still pulsing through her as he rose over her, crawling up her body, bracing her legs around him. He took himself in hand and entered her in a smooth thrust and she tilted up to meet him.

He was too tall and she felt crowded and the angle wasn't quite right. All of these thoughts flitted

through her mind and he rolled with her, pulling her to straddle him. She sank on him, letting her body impale itself with a sigh.

Perfect.

He pulled her flush against him, his hands on her back, teeth on her neck. “Yes, you are.”

He thrust hard into her, making her gasp and squirm. The pressure began to build inside her again with each stroke, and she sat up, hands over his tattoos, legs clamped tight on his hips. He held her ankles in a tight grip that just made her body flush harder, making her arch into each thrust. She rode him to a exhilarating finish, throwing back her head and shouting as she came. He held her in place and bucked up into her hard. She lost track of how long he kept up that pace, and she peaked once more before, with a shout of his own, he followed her over the edge. She collapsed onto his chest, utterly satisfied. She vaguely noticed him slipping from her body and moving her around so her legs weren't cramped and folded.

She didn't want to move ever again. She didn't even care that they were sideways on the bed, closer to the foot of it than any pillows. She sprawled half across him, his arm tucking her so close one leg was thrown over his, her head resting on his chest. She traced the tattoo she could see – the other one being under her cheek – and listened to their combined breathing slow from gasps to rest.

“What was first?” she asked. “The ink or the wolf?”

His body shook slightly as he laughed. “The wolf.”

A myriad of half remembered dialogue lines and images from the game went through her head, all jumbled together. She could only guess how much of it he picked up on.

“He didn't want a body, but she asked him to come,” Cole said. “He left a scar when he burned her off his face.” Mythal's supplicant garden, guarded by stone wolves taller than a man. The gentle, watchful face of guardian wolves on every map of the game. The mural of a wolf-cloaked Solas, removing the vallaslin from the elves to free them. His people. His. How many did he govern on his own? How many joined him in rebellion? *“He wants to give wisdom, not orders.”*

“You never wanted to be a physical entity,” she murmured, not quite a question. “Or a servant to another's will.”

“That is very ancient history.” His hand covered hers where it traced along the lines of the foreleg tattooed on him.

“You're real and it means everyone could be real. It changes everything, but it can't.”

“Yes it can,” he said aloud. “I did not know Cole told you such things.”

“It was his only way to hint at what you were in the game. You never got upset at him for it, as if you wanted the world to know. To see you.”

“Someday the magic will come back. All of it.” Sandal's voice in her head now. *“The shadows will part and skies will open wide. When he rises, everyone will see.”*

He took a sharp breath under her, disturbing the prophecy out of her head. She looked up at him to see him watching her. “Does it scare you that I know all this?” she asked.

“No. Perhaps. I do not wish to lose you.” He huffed. “As selfish as that is.”

She hitched herself higher on him, and pressed a kiss to his lips. “You won't lose me, Solas. I always knew all this. I loved you anyway. I am yours.”

He held her close and kissed her again, insistently. *And you are mine.*

Chapter End Notes

At Last plays in the distance...

Ar isala ma – I desire/need you (specifically in a sexual context). Thank you FenxShiral for the wonderful Project Elvhen.

A Trade of Words For Trust

Chapter Notes

7/7/20

Carly pounded her fists on the War Table, light glowing from behind the bandage on the Anchor. The talk had circled around and around. Should they reinforce the troops following the trail left by the Venatori, should they shore up their resources and wait for Corypheus to make his next move. Back and forth, over and over. “Look, I already know what our next move has to be.”

Cullen, Cassandra and Josephine all jumped at her vehemence and she stood back and rubbed her face. Only Leliana had not reacted to her outburst.

“Sorry, I’m just...I’m frustrated. You put me in this position of leadership which seems to be all well and good when you want me to fight for you, or make decisions in some sort of court, but you never seem to want to listen to what I have to say when it comes to our plans.” She blew out a forceful breath. “Ugh, before I do anything, I need to talk to Morrigan.”

“I believe she is in the garden,” Leliana said. The Nightingale turned to the others, who almost looked betrayed by her easy acquiescence. “The Inquisitor has the will of Andraste. I trust her to know what she is doing.”

“Thank you, Leliana.”

Carly left the War Room and marched across the Great Hall to the exit for the garden, taking a moment to clear her head and enjoy the sun on her face. The weather had finally turned in the mountains, the spring air fresh and warm after months of snow and rain. She hoped Solas was enjoying it too and hadn’t locked himself in the rotunda. She snorted to herself. Well, he might be napping. Even ancient elves needed sleep now and then. She sure could use some.

Her mood restored on the heels of that thought – and the memories it brought to the forefront of her mind – she turned towards the stone gazebo, finding Morrigan in the shade of it. Kieran was exploring the hedges, following a trail only known to him. “Can we speak?”

“Of course, Inquisitor. How may I be of service?”

“We need to go to the Arbor Wilds. The Temple of Mythal, specifically. Corypheus will want to attack it, because an Eluvian is there. If he gains the Crossroads, he can break into the Fade.”

“How do you know this?” Carly tilted her head. Morrigan gave her a soft, knowing smile. “Of course.”

“Leliana has said I have the will of Andraste, and therefore, I know things that I should not. I just go with it.” She gave Morrigan a playful look, reminding the Witch that her cover was still in place.

“Andraste’s Herald is indeed a useful ploy. And I think ‘tis one you have cultivated to suit your purposes well. You know what else is allegedly within Mythal’s Temple, do you not? And there is more to this than an Eluvian.”

“Yes. I know we need to go there, you are my best chance of getting there before Corypheus and you are an integral part of *why* I have to go there. I'd been hoping to give you more time, to figure this out on your own, but they're getting pushy. I can't wait any longer.”

“You tell me you cannot speak plainly of yourself, and yet you are very blunt, Inquisitor.” She stood, towering over Carly, who once again cursed Dalish body models. The Witch was willowy and graceful, her face drawn in a thoughtful expression that belied her appearance of being nothing more than a pretty face in a blatantly outrageous outfit. “Very well, I shall scout out the quickest route to the Temple. I assume you will be bringing some measure of your forces?”

“Some. And Solas.”

Morrigan's face went flat with momentary disapproval, but it cleared quickly. “A hedge mage elf. Ah, I suppose, 'tis a holy place to one of his own gods.”

Something like that.

“'Tis good of you to not forsake the old ways.”

“They're important,” Carly said. “Just remember what I said about myths and legends and getting it wrong. Let me know when you're ready to go. I don't want to give Corypheus a head start. That will only end in the destruction of the Temple. I don't want that.”

“How do you know?” Morrigan's voice called to her as she started to walk away.

“I just...I've had to live through it, in a manner of speaking,” she replied with a shrug. “It's the same reason I know your son carries the spark of Urthemiel. And I know what the following move should be once we reach the Temple. And I know that no matter what else happens, we're going to defeat that Vint monstrosity.”

“I suppose I am not in a position to judge, keeping secrets as I do, although apparently none from you.” She gave an almost regal nod. “I shall trust that you know what you're doing.”

“That makes my life easier, so thanks.”

Morrigan just laughed.

Solas was, indeed, in the rotunda. But he was just sitting at his work table, scowling into his cup. “You don't like tea, love, why are you drinking it?”

He glanced at her, his face changing instantly to a warm welcome as he put the teacup down. She crossed to him and sat sideways across his legs, her grin impish when his hands automatically went to support her so she didn't slide off. “I still need the...restorative qualities. From time to time.”

“Oh, am I keeping you up too late at night? There's this stuff, I don't know if you've heard of it. It's called food? I'm told it's highly nutritious and restorative.”

He raised a sardonic brow at her and flicked the end of her nose. “Irreverence, ma vhenan?”

She leaned in and kissed him with a smack. “Always, ma fen. You should know that by now.”

“Hmm. How is your hand?”

“Evasion by changing the subject,” she sighed with an air of disappointment before favoring him

with a grin. "It's feeling much better, thank you."

He took her hand in his, unwrapping the bandage so he could see. He'd cleaned it for her and done what healing he could. The bandage had mostly been for show to the rest of the Inquisition. Not that it mattered. It was still slowly eating away at the fiber of her being. They both knew it. He placed a kiss in the center of her palm and she smiled to feel the tingles of more healing magic pass through her skin.

"So smooth," she whispered. He smiled against her hand and then bit the fleshy base of her thumb, making her jump. "Ooh, I'm gonna have to enroll you in dog school. You're always so nippy."

He held her closer, his breath ghosting over her skin as he leaned in almost enough to kiss her. "Do you think you have what it takes to make me...obedient?"

Her brain emptied in the rush of heat that blazed through her, leaving only a searing mental image that made his eyes sparkle as he caught it. He gave a quiet laugh through his nose and then pulled her into a kiss that left her breathless as well as mindless. True to form, he bit her lip and she felt like she might just dissolve in his lap. He was going to be the death of her.

"Only little ones, vhenan," he murmured against her lips.

"That's a terrible habit."

"You let me do it," he countered, nosing her head to the side to kiss her neck. "You certainly have no complaints on how I use it."

The distinctive sound of a clearing throat broke them apart and Carly looked up to see Dorian hanging over the railing of the second story, frowning. "Some of us are trying to read, if you don't mind."

"Don't you know by now that kisses make everything better, Dorian?" she said with a smile.

He gave them both a look of completely false disgust and wandered back to his seat, out of sight of them.

Solas was trying hard not to laugh, and a joyous feeling burst through the bubble of desire, making itself at home. "I like seeing you so happy, love."

"It is an unusual feeling, I will admit. Now, I get the sense that you did not come in here just to distract me."

"You would be right, although it's been a thoroughly enjoyable side benefit. Morrigan is scouting for Mythal's Temple. We have to go there. Preferably before Corypheus."

His happy expression faded, leaving behind his more typical seriousness. "The Well of Sorrows."

"And the Eluvian that goes with it, that's actually the important part," she added with a nod, not at all surprised that he knew exactly what was there. Of course he did. "And Abelas."

"Abelas? He yet lives?"

"He does. Along with an entire troop of Sentinels. They sleep when the Temple is at rest, only coming out of uthenera when someone is there. You didn't think you were the only one, did you?"

"I didn't dare to think..."

“I always did kinda figure you knew each other. I mean, Mythal's Sentinel and Mythal's Guardian...it makes sense.”

“More precisely, we know *of* each other. While I stood at Mythal's side, he was a defender in her service. Not a lesser duty by any means, but one that did not allow us to cross paths often.”

“And then she died, you rebelled and he secluded himself. Will you come with me? I might need you. He's very...bitter. And a bit intimidating.”

“Yes, he would be after all this time. I can understand why. And yes, of course I will come with you. I can be intimidating too.”

“Yeah, I know you can.” She leaned against him, resting her head on his shoulder, letting a peaceful feeling settle around them. Assured and solid. “Good, then that's a plan.”

“Since that is settled, where were we?” he asked idly, drawing her back to him. It was a long time before she left his lap and his tea had grown very cold.

We're All Disasters

Chapter Notes

7/10/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Before heading to the tavern, Carly went down to the rotunda to see what Solas was up to. He was pouring over something at his worktable and barely glanced at her when she deliberately scuffed her feet to let him know she was there. *Never sneak up on a god*, she thought, tossing back the edges of the light cloak she was wearing against the evening chill.

"I am not a god," he murmured as she got closer. He absently put out his hand and she twined hers with it, letting herself be drawn closer to stand next to his chair. She leaned down and kissed the top of his head. "Am I truly so terrifying?"

"Well, you've been known to be."

"Ancient history," he retorted, making her snort.

Two words, my love: Slow Arrow.

He slowly sat back and looked up at her, his expression a mix of apprehension and guilt. "There truly are no secrets from you."

She kissed his forehead this time, right over his scar. "Nope. But we're not going to dig into that tonight, because I have a standing offer at the Rest for a beer and I'm going to take it."

"Carly..."

"Solas..." She raised an eyebrow at him and sighed. "Fine, you want to do this now? You have a ruthless streak a mile wide, and I know it well, *Pride*. From your perspective he failed in his duty to you, and you were frustrated and angry and probably hadn't even woken up yet to see the reality of what you'd wrought. You think I don't know that now you know he was right about this world and you regret taking such...*rash* action?"

His face changed, turned to something chagrined and she knew she had him cornered. His arm slipped around her waist and he balanced his chin against her ribs, looking up at her plaintively and full of regret. She traced her fingers along the edge of his ear. A breath shuddered out of him.

"Yeah, that's what I thought. Look, I can't change the past, only the future. And holding shit over your head that you did before you knew me isn't very fair. I'm not excusing you for murdering your own agent, and if you do it again I'll do more than just break up with you. But what's done is done, and I can't change it, so I'm not dwelling on it. Is that an oversimplification? Absolutely. But I've got bigger things to worry about than what you did in uthenera when you didn't know anything about this world."

"I don't deserve you." He said it simply, a statement of fact. She bent down a bit so they were eye to eye.

“No shit. I love you anyway,” she whispered, not even bothering to deny that he was right. “And hey, there's a simple cure for that.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. Do better.” She waited to see if his expression would turn stony. She knew it was highly unlikely anyone else could have gotten away with calling him out on his bullshit and holding him to a higher standard. But he just smiled at her. *Ahh, there it is. Challenge accepted.*

She leaned in and kissed his lips. His hand slipped into her hair to hold her in place and deepened it, slanting his mouth over hers until she was gasping. He released her just as quickly and turned back to his book. “Enjoy the tavern, vhenan.”

“I will, ma fen. Keep the bed warm for me. I'm liable to be late.” He snorted as if that was no surprise and she grinned fatuously down at his bent head. “Ar lath ma, Solas.”

Before she could step away from his side, his arm snaked under her cloak, wrapping around her again. His hand landed on the curve of her ass and he grabbed a handful, making her squeak. His grin turned mischievous without his eyes ever leaving the page. He gave her a pat and let her go. “Ar lath ma, vhenan.”

Her steps were a bit unsteady as she left the rotunda.

The doors of the Herald's Rest were open and Carly could hear the noise pouring forth while she was still crossing the courtyard. It sounded like Varric was storytelling, punctuated by laughter and toasts. She went in and leaned against the door to take in the scene, confirming her guess. He sat on top of a table, in clear view of everyone around, Hawke seated below him on the bench, her face split in a rueful grin. The Chargers were gathered in their usual corner, but every face was turned to the dwarf intently. Bull had Dorian leaning against his shoulder, suspiciously comfortable, their hands out of sight under a table.

“And then,” Varric crowed, “she went and *bought* half the Maker damned mine!” The tavern exploded into laughter again and Carly smiled. She knew parts of this story, having played the game herself. “The paperwork is endless!”

“I never asked you to be my book keeper,” Hawke shouted into the cacophony of laughter.

“Who else was going to do it? You're terrible at sums. You would have forgotten to add in my cut.”

“As if you need more gold, Tethras,” Hawke snarked back, and more laughter ensued. Carly was fairly sure she wasn't the only one who saw the lingering, affectionate look that passed between them. She pushed off the door frame and joined them at their table as Varric climbed off it and settled next to Hawke.

“Okay, I gotta ask. How long?”

“How long what?” Varric deflected, but Hawke just grinned.

“Who are you still trying to fool, dwarf?” Carly asked pointedly.

“I knew after the Arishok,” Hawke interjected and Varric blushed. Carly bit her lip. “He stayed with me the whole time. Saw me at my lowest. Wasn't any chance of me letting him get away after that.”

“Did you have to do a bit of chasing, Marian?” she asked, enjoying the fluster growing on Varric's face.

“A bit, yeah. He's stubborn, you know.”

“Oh, I know all about stubborn men.” She turned to her bestie. “You promised me beer, by the way.”

“Never let it be said I disappointed the ladies in my life,” he grumbled falsely with an overly elaborate bow and a cheeky grin. “One tankard, coming up.”

She and Hawke both watched him go, then laughed as they caught each other. “You know him well, I see.”

“I'd be dead without him, you know,” she replied. “He knew from the start that I wasn't from this world. He helped me.”

“He told me that in your world, this is all...a game? That you've been me?” Hawke kept her voice low, but the tavern was crowded and loud enough to conversely give them privacy.

“Yeah. The events of Thedas happen over a series a games. The first one is about the Hero of Ferelden and the Fifth Blight. The second one is about you, everything from Ostagar to...Anders. The most recent is about all this.” She waved a hand around to include the Breach. “And then there's books and stuff about all the history and theories and...I could go on and on.”

“It's hard to fathom.”

“I'm sure. But yeah, I've walked in your shoes, so to speak. I was half in love with Varric from the first moment I laid eyes on him.” She snorted. “Couldn't have him, though. He wasn't a romanceable option.”

“I'm not sure I want to dig into what that means.” Hawke arched a single perfect brow.

“It means that I got to make the decisions on how things happened. And along the way, I could pick who I wanted to fall for. If only it was that easy in real life, eh?”

“Indeed.”

Varric returned and thumped a foaming tankard in front of her. She sipped it and let the flavor roll around in her mouth before swallowing. That was certainly one thing to enjoy in this world. The beer was better than anything in her own. “You two gossiping behind my back?”

“Just be thankful it isn't *about* your back,” Carly teased.

“Maker's balls...why did I agree to this?”

“Because you love us both so much.” Hawke nodded agreement to her statement and he just looked stumped, a singularly hilarious expression for someone who never seemed to run out of words.

“How's Chuckles,” he said finally, turning the subject back on her. She made a face at him, knowing what he was doing and Hawke laughed loudly, appreciating it.

“He's good. Nose deep in some dusty tome.”

“You sure know how to pick'em, Peaches.”

She winked and added saucily, "As long as he dusts himself off before he's nose deep in me, I'm fine with it."

"Augh," Varric sputtered. "That's not a mental image I wanted."

"You started it," she said, putting on her best innocent look.

"Drink your beer, Inquisitor, I need to bleach my brain." And he turned to Hawke. Carly watched his whole face change, even though his expression stayed the same. Hawke returned his look, and it was a shock that the table didn't just burst into flames in front of them. She knew the feeling well, and hoped to be feeling it herself for a long time to come. She grinned into her tankard before thumping it on the table to break them metaphorically apart.

"I'll leave you two alone and go bother Bull and Dorian."

"You do that," Hawke murmured. Carly shook her head and left them to it, too happy for her friends' happiness to feel ignored.

"Boss!" Bull shouted when she reached their corner of the Rest. Dorian seemed to jolt out of whatever distant place he'd been and gave her a crooked smile in greeting. Carly bit her lip. He looked rather...disheveled.

"Bull, is that your hand in his pocket? I'm quite certain Dorian wouldn't be that happy to see me all on his own," she said softly, slipping onto the bench on Bull's free side. It was also his blind side, but she didn't think he minded too much. "How does your hand even fit in his pocket?"

"Have to take my fun where I can get it," Bull said cheerfully and Carly snorted.

"Fun, is it? Still trying to tell me the Qunari don't have emotionally fulfilling relationships, my friend? I'm not stupid."

"Don't spread it around," he muttered, still smiling broadly. "What brings you out here tonight?"

"Time with my friends, good beer, and a desire *not* to think about the end of the world."

"Those are good reasons. I'll drink to that." He raised his own vastly larger tankard against hers with a wooden click.

Dorian finally snapped his head around and she saw him shove Bull's arm away surreptitiously so he could straighten his clothes. "Leaving our other illustrious mage to his own devices this evening?"

"He's busy."

"I'm sure you'll distract him when you're ready," Bull said around a belch.

"Vishante kaffas, must you be so brutish?" Dorian snapped.

"You like it." She waited to see how Dorian would respond. She could hear the lines from the game play in her head, but as Dorian had said, art only imitated real life so far.

"That's not the point," the mage sputtered.

"Dorian, my darling," she said before Bull could say anything, "that's *precisely* the point."

"Hey," Bull drawled. "Don't go giving away all my secrets."

“For a giant beast of a man who cares little for public discretion, I am certain you don't need the Inquisitor's help giving away your secrets,” Dorian said, almost growling. But Carly caught the fond glimmer in his eye and just shook her head.

“You two are adorable.” She snorted to herself. Of course they were. They were Adoribull, after all.

“Hey, none of that.” It was Bull's turn to sputter and she laughed, standing up to reach his face. She kissed his cheek, then bent over across him to kiss Dorian's brow.

“Feeling affectionate tonight, my dear?” Dorian asked lightly.

“I'm just happy that all of us disasters are happy. Can't I share that a little?”

“Indeed you may. I shall join you.” He raised up a delicate wineglass and tilted it towards her tankard. She settled back next to Bull and was only a little shocked when his massive arm slid around her to hug her close.

Chapter End Notes

Just a quick note: I LOVE YOU ALL! Your readership has made this fic the most popular thing I've ever written. Heaps of hugs and kudos to you all. Thank you.

No Whispers In the Library**

Chapter Notes

7/14/20

NSFW

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A light was still burning in the rotunda as she walked back through the keep, and she went that way instead of climbing the endless stairs to her chambers. She closed the doors behind her quietly when she saw Solas sound asleep in his chair, a small smile on curving her lips. She bolted the doors and crept around to the second floor, closing those doors too, so they were essentially cut off from the rest of the castle. Thankfully the third floor was just used for storage now that Leliana didn't live there.

Carefully, silently so she didn't wake him prematurely, Carly climbed onto the worktable and braced one of her feet on the arm of his chair. His face was smooth as he slept, his breathing quiet, barely moving the jawbone on his chest. She leaned on her fist and just watched him. It wasn't often she could see him at such repose, all joking about how he could sleep anywhere aside. The lanterns burned low, casting the rest of the lower story in shadow much like the night she watched him paint.

Ma fen, she thought. My beautiful vhenan.

He stirred and she felt a smile creep across her face as his eyes opened. For a moment he just looked at her, then his hand curled around her ankle where it was braced on the chair. A sizzle went through her at his touch. His calm waking face morphed into something sharper, and his grip on her ankle turned implacable with the barest shift of his fingers.

"I thought you would be abed," he said, voice gruff with sleep.

"I saw the lights still on in here. You looked so peaceful."

"A rare moment of weakness," he said with a quirk of his lips. His thumb slipped under the hem of her leggings, flexing against the tendon on the back of her leg.

"C'mere," she whispered, leaning back off her hand and stretching it out to him. He stood, pulling her leg up as he did, stepping into the space as she widened her legs. She cupped the back of his head as he leaned over her, still taller even with her on the table. He met her kiss softly at first, just a brush, a tease. She hummed in the back of her throat, wanting so much more.

And he gave it, nipping her bottom lip in his teeth, tugging lightly so she gasped. He took advantage of that and slipped his tongue against hers, their mouths finally pressed together so no air escaped from between them. She clung to him, scooting to the edge of the table to wrap around him more fully. His hand left her ankle to slide up the length of her leg and under her. He brought his other arm around her, supporting her back as he suddenly lifted her right off the table.

She laughed when he sank back into his chair with her straddling his legs. She got herself more

comfortable and shook her head at him. “So, so smooth, my love.”

He smiled crookedly and started unbuttoning the corseted vest she wore, pushing the cloak off her shoulders first to drop onto the floor. He pressed kisses along the column of her throat as he exposed more of her skin and she tipped her head back, cradling his own in her hands. She was suddenly very glad she'd bolted the doors. With an snarl of impatience he yanked the vest off her shoulders, pinning her arms in place, teeth in her skin, across the curve of her breast. His hands dropped to her hips, tugging on her leggings now.

“Solas, let me stand up.”

“No.”

She giggled. “You won't get very far with me in your lap unless you're going to rip them.”

He paused and looked up at her. Ooh, she'd seen that look before. The night he'd stalked her through this exact spot, all wolf. A young, angry Elvhen god, she remembered. Her breath caught and her brain short circuited. Her hands slid down from his head to the leather straps of the jawbone necklace almost mechanically, lifting it off him slowly. He took it from her and let it slither from his fingers to clack on the floor.

After that it was like she'd given him permission and he brought her close again, his hands feverish against her skin as he peeled the vest and her shirt away. When had he even unbuttoned that? His fingers raked down her back, freeing her breastband, and she shivered. He trailed down to the laces at her waist, loosening them until he could push them off her backside, his hands hard and calloused against her skin as he bared it. Something primal and excited rose in her and she lifted off him so he could bunch the material lower on her thighs. When she sat back onto his lap, he pulled off his sweater, tossing it aside. He didn't bother with the leather undershirt but went to unlace his usual patched trousers. Her body clenched in anticipation.

She pushed his hands away as he slouched down in the chair, shifting them to line up better. She drew his length out, her fingers cool on him so he hissed. He was already hard and pulsing in her hand. She met his eyes for the barest second, shocked into stillness by the sound he made as she stroked him.

“Ma fen,” she breathed out. He crushed her mouth to his and she guided his length into her, sinking on him slowly, the angle nearly impossible. He held her hips, seating her more fully on him as he slid further down in the chair. Her legs wanted to spread further, but couldn't. She was bound in her own clothes and that added a spice she hadn't known she craved. The best she could manage was to lift her knees, changing the angle. He groaned at the feel of her body tightening on him and the hands on her hips turned bruising. She whimpered and he broke the kiss to gaze into her eyes. She traced the lines of freckles across his cheekbones, her fingers whispering on his skin.

Something snapped in him and he moved his arms to her back, trapping her between them as his hands held her shoulders. He brought her close, burying his head in the crook of her neck. His teeth closed on his favorite spot and she gasped. He pulled her down on him, slamming into her body. The fullness was almost unbearably good. She let out a cry that echoed in the empty rotunda. He chuckled against her skin, his breath hot on her.

“More,” she begged. He obliged, pounding up into her, shattering her. She whimpered and writhed and still he was relentless. But it wasn't enough to tip her over the edge. He followed the thought unspoken in her head and one hand drifted between them, until his thumb came to rest against her mound. He let it stay there, not reaching for more, letting it build as he slowed his pace. He made a low rumbling sound as she softened around him, growing slicker with each teasing motion of his

thumb, never quite hitting where she wanted it. She tried to rock on him, tried to get him to move more and he simply stopped altogether.

“Please, Solas...”

“Tell me,” he whispered against her throat, nipping and licking the sweat that had beaded there in the hollow between her collarbones.

“Touch me,” she exhaled, using all her strength to keep her mind from just going blank. His thumb finally slipped lower, between her legs to brush against her clit, so lightly. She whined and he did it again, teasing. She hissed, “Fenedhis.”

He barked out a laugh. “You seem to have that in your custody already.”

She growled at him and that just made him laugh harder, but he pressed his thumb against her more firmly and the growl died on a moan. He kept it there, a steady pressure and he surged into her again. She jolted on him, her hands digging into the leather at his neck. He drew a few inches away from her, slipping out from her heat with a groan before he slammed back into her. His thumb slid against her now as her slick spread. Again and again he pounded into her, each thrust driving her higher and closer to release as he kept up the pressure against her nub.

She felt like she might splinter from the force of it and she took a hold of his head, lifting it so she could kiss him, her teeth biting down on him for a change. He groaned under and he thrust into her hard and fast. So much power cradled in her hands, confined under her body. Like lightning her orgasm started at her scalp, racing down her spine and outwards to her limbs before her center imploded. She dug her nails into the back of his head and he drew in a sharp breath, his pace never changing as she rode him to a spectacular finish.

There was a new urgency in his body as she came down from the climax and his hands moved under her ass, keeping her seated on him as he stood up and put her back on the table, shoving his pile of books off the end with a clatter and plop. He held her legs, still trapped in the cursed leggings, lifting them until her ankles rested on his shoulders, unable to part more than enough for his head to be between them. She was forced to lay back on the wood of the table if she wanted to keep breathing. He quirked a brow at her, the carnal gleam in his eye making breath pointless anyhow. She gripped the edge of the table and gave him a look, daring him to do his worst. His hands tunneled under her, holding her steady, and he *filled* her.

It hit at a totally new angle, one that made her see stars with each impact of his pelvis against her. Her cries grew broken but louder, reverberating around the open stories, bouncing back to her to mingle with new ones. He seemed to revel in her shouts and moans, his thrusts keeping up a tempo that had her arching her back.

“Fuck...Solas....*there!*”

He held her up by her hips, going as deep as he could and she unraveled around him, the rush of orgasm nearly blinding. Before she could come down from the high of it, he followed her, pulsing inside her, keeping her on a keen series of aftershocks that made her shake. He let go of her hips and braced himself on the table, his breath panting from him. Her legs trembled against him and he helped her lower them, pulled her up so she was sitting again, disheveled, half naked and sweating.

He turned away, heading to his rag pile, grabbing a clean one for her. He hadn't even bothered to tuck himself back into his breeches and the shock of seeing him unlaced yet fully dressed made her clench involuntarily as desire sparked all over again. It must have shown on her face, since he stopped and smirked at her.

“So soon, vhenan? Was that not enough?”

She shook her head slowly. “It's never enough.”

He pulled her to her feet and kissed her hard, tongue pushing past her lips to fill her mouth. She felt a wave of tingles throughout her body as he applied his magic, healing up the myriad bruises and bites he'd put on her. She shivered in his arms and when he pulled back he was smiling down at her.

“Clean yourself up, vhenan,” he whispered in her ear. “We'll go up to bed, and I shall do it all over again.”

Chapter End Notes

We needed rotunda lovin' right?

Guardian Eyes**

Chapter Notes

7/17/20

This wasn't supposed to be NSFW, but *some Egg had other ideas. I blame him for failing in my attempts to keep my porn plotless, so if you want to skip it, I have marked where the actual smut begins with (**).*

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Arbor Wilds was much hotter and stickier than she expected for a place so far south. Solas said something about underground volcanoes and it clicked that this spot was like Yellowstone National Park, ready to blow any moment but in the meantime stable. She assumed that's what made Frostback Basin so temperate too, considering it was just as far south on the other side of the mountain range. It was funny how used to being below the equator of Thedas she had become.

The Inquisition party made their camp in the bend of the river that ran through it well before nightfall to enjoy some of the cooler air that came with the darkness. Only a single fire was lit – to cook dinner for the small troop of soldiers sent along to the Temple – and Carly stripped out of her armor gratefully, knowing she didn't have to assign anyone to keep watch.

“Come with me, vhenan,” Solas said, appearing out of the darkness like a wraith. He couldn't possibly know why she froze hearing those words in that particular tone; she'd locked down the memories of Crestwood tight after nearly letting him see them all those months ago. Especially once they'd gone there and she got to see the place in real life. He looked at her quizzically until she stood and took his hand.

“You aren't breaking up with me, are you?” she asked as he led her away from the camp.

“Of course not. Why would you ask such a thing?”

“Just checking,” she said, her fingers twined with his. She stopped and tugged on him until he looked at her. “Are you planning to take my vallaslin?”

He raised a brow at her. “Do you want me to?”

She thought about it for a moment. She'd gotten used to the sight of black from the corner of her eye. He didn't look at it with distaste anymore, not since she told him why she'd chosen the image. Finally she shook her head, and let him lead her to wherever they were going.

“Why do you ask these things?”

“I never told you, did I, just *how* you leave the Inquisitor in the games?”

“You did not. It seemed...unwise to inquire.”

She finally let the scene run in her head. “*Ar lasa mala revas. You are free. You are so beautiful.*” A single lingering kiss, a change in expression so rapid it was devastating. “*And I'm sorry, I distracted you from your duty. It will never happen again.*” He backed away, the light dying in his

eyes, his expression falling to one of despair.

“Solas...don't leave me, not now. I love you.”

“You have a rare and marvelous spirit. In another world...”

“Why not this one?”

“I...can't. I'm sorry.” He turned and walked away.

“You start the conversation the same way you just started this one, then you take her to Crestwood and the wyvern cave. You had intended to tell her everything, then...don't at the last second. You break up with her instead. It's...awful.”

“Carly.” He stopped and drew her to him. “I am not that man,” he whispered into her hair as he held her close. “You are my light and purpose. I will not leave you.”

She shuddered against him, not realizing just how much she'd needed to hear him say he wasn't going to leave her. She burrowed against him and whispered, “Ar lath ma.”

“Ar lath ma, vhenan. You have held that memory a long time,” he noted, tilting her head back to kiss her. “The piece of foreknowledge you would not give me. I will not leave you,” he repeated.

“Okay, good. Cuz if you suddenly decided to take me there, I think I would have to kill you. Seriously, Solas, the wyvern cave?”

He chuckled, and it broke the tension as she hoped it would. “It is a beautiful spot.”

She made a face at him. “Sure, once you get through the dark, twisty tunnel full of deep mushrooms growing out of *spider bodies*.”

He chuckled again. “Ah, that is a valid point. Come,” he tugged her hand, “let me take you somewhere else then, with no spider bodies. Where I may bestow a gift of cooling, under the watchful eyes of...myself.”

She let him lead her and sure enough, they came out of the tangled trees to a secluded pool – an eddy of the river – where a towering statue of Fen'Harel peeked out on the other side, covered in vines and nearly hidden by the jungle growth of the area. The stone paws hung in the water, creating the swirling pool as the river curled around it. And she laughed, nearly falling over.

“Oh, ma fen, it's perfect.”

He smiled as his answer and gestured to her to undress and get in the water while he walked a little distance up and down the edge of the river, casting wards around them. She lost no time in stripping and unpinning her hair. She walked into the river, shivering as the much cooler water hit her. It deepened quickly, leaving her waist deep before she turned to see him watching her.

“Are you joining me?” she asked playfully.

“Should I?”

“Solas, where's the fun of having a private pool under your own guarding eyes if you're over there?”

She turned her back on him, wading deeper into the river, feeling the eddies of the current go past her. She felt the ripples of him behind her before his hands slipped around her waist, his skin

already cool against her. She looked up and saw stars between the reaching branches of the trees, a sliver of the moon. Solas cupped handfuls of water and let them dribble down her arms and shoulders, apparently enjoying the puckering of her skin as the droplets slid. She leaned on him and let him play. She'd come to learn that he loved to touch, the more lingering the better.

His fingers traced along the side of her neck and she dropped her head to the side. He brushed her hair out of the way, the sweaty strands sticking to both of them. Then he lowered his lips along her skin, from her nape to the ball of her shoulder. He nipped her on the rounded edge of it and she chuckled.

"I thought we were here to cool off, not get hot and bothered."

"Would you like me to stop?" he murmured in her ear, his fingers now tickling across her belly. She could feel him getting hard behind her.

"Never." She felt an urge to splash him. "Might make you work for it, though."

She ducked out of his arms, turning in the water and pushing a wave of it at him as she darted away, her legs heavy against the current. The sly look she loved best appeared on his face and the chase was on. The water never got truly deep, but it was enough that she could launch herself through it, swimming away from him as he pursued her. But he was quick too, and often grabbed a foot before she got too far. She slapped at the water, aiming it towards him, spraying him in a shower of drops that clung to him like diamonds.

And then she would be off again, swimming away from him, her hair a tangled mess behind her, half soaked and straggling down her back when she stood up. She shouted with laughter when he launched himself at her again, their splashes louder than the sound of the river eddying around the foot of his statue. And then she slipped and fell in.

He caught her and hauled her up, his momentary fear that she'd gotten too much water in her lungs belied as she laughed and twisted in his arms to face him, wrapping her legs around him in the water. He was tall enough that when he sank to his knees their heads were still above the surface. She leaned back and swished her hair in the water to free it from its clinging on her and when she sat back up, he was looking at her with more heat than playfulness. She leaned in and kissed him, her lips cool against his after her dunking.

**

He drew her closer, his erection prodding at her. She made a face at him; flowing water wasn't the best lubricant. He smirked at her and ran his fingers under her, spreading her more open and teasing against her opening with a touch just slightly heavier than the press of the current. It was an intoxicating combination and soon enough he slid into her without trouble, sealing them together like puzzle pieces.

She rocked on him, enjoying how he filled her, how his hands held her steady in the current. He kissed her, working down her jaw to her neck and she obligingly tipped her head back to let him. She waited for his teeth, but he didn't seem to be in that kind of mood, instead sipping up the droplets from her skin. She held onto him with her arms around his neck, her hand splayed out across his scalp, for a moment wishing he had hair she could pull.

He stood up with her suddenly, sliding out of her body as he walked. He carried her out of the river to the grassy bank where their clothes lay in a pile, dropping her onto her back in a carefully controlled descent. She smiled up at him, then gasped as he spread her wide and reentered her in one stroke. Her legs bent over his back, her hips rising to meet his. She bit down on her cries,

knowing they weren't that far from camp, regardless of his wards. He cradled the back of her head as he thrust into her, his fingers holding her tight. It was rare that they made love this way and she sighed against his throat, urging him on.

Her climax built slowly in this position, her body arched and strung tight under him like her bow. He knew it too, and played it up for all it was worth before sending her over the edge. She gasped and whimpered against him, hands clawing at his back to bring him closer and that tipped him over too. When he pulled back enough to press light kisses along her hairline and down her cheeks she just smiled. He captured her mouth with his and the kiss lingered long after his body had withdrawn from hers and their heart rates had settled.

“Did I work hard enough, vhenan?”

“For now,” she teased. Then she realized she was probably a horrible mess. “I’m gonna have to go back in the water. I’m sure I’m half mud, half grass at this point.”

He kissed her again, lightly. “Probably.”

He pulled away, sitting back on his heels and helping her to get up. He stayed there as she stood, towering over him for a change, the light in his eyes rekindling. “Oh no, I’m getting clean. And then we should get back to camp before they start looking for us. Cullen would burst a blood vessel if he saw his Inquisitor naked.”

Solas barked a laugh, but he still pulled her close and ran his mouth against her hipbone, his hand firmly clamped on her backside. It was almost enough to change her mind, but she gave him a playful push and waded back into the river. Time enough for them to indulge however they wanted once this was all over.

She let the feeling of knowing they would settle into her, filling up the spaces where doubt had been. She peeked over her shoulder at him lounging on the grass unabashedly naked, watching her and she smiled at him.

“I love you, ma fen. So very much.”

“I know you do. And I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

If I recall correctly, someone suggested a chase scene at one point. Hope it was fun!

Meanings Lost to Time

Chapter Notes

7/21/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly ambled slowly through the tunnel leading to the outer courtyard. They'd gotten there in time, it seemed. There were no Red Templars anywhere, nor any demons. Cullen's scouts reported signs of a vast approaching army, but it was still a day away. If they were quick, they would be in and out of the Temple before Corypheus got there.

She and her party emerged into the sunlight at the balustrade and she looked down at the bridge, the two defensive columns and the line of Sentinels. "Oh, dammit, I forgot this part."

Morrigan looked at her askance, then noticed that she was the only one to do so. Solas and Cole took the statement calmly. "Inquisitor," she asked, trying to hide her curiosity under a layer of calm, "what did you forget?"

Unless we can get the Sentinels to allow us entry, we'll have to fight them. Those defensive towers will strike all of us down if we're not careful, she thought loud enough for Solas to hear. *I'd rather not.*

"Hmm," he murmured beside her. Not exactly a helpful response and she blew out a breath so hard it was almost a raspberry.

"Any ideas?" she said aloud, pointedly. If that's how he wanted to play it, she'd push.

"You are determined, aren't you?" he said, frowning.

To out you? No, of course not. "I am determined to get to the Temple before Corypheus does. We have two options. Fight or persuade. You speak more Elvish than I do." He nodded, acknowledging she was right. "If it helps, we'll wait here."

"I think that would be wise," he said. She watched him go down the stairs, his gait loose and confident, carrying him quickly across the distance. She knew that if any of the Sentinels recognized him, this would go one of two ways. One of which was potentially bad. She surreptitiously loosened her bow on her shoulder so she could reach it quickly if need be.

"He is Pride," Cole said. "You shouldn't worry."

"I know. I'm still allowed to though."

"Inquisitor, why do I get the feeling I am missing half this conversation?" Morrigan asked.

"Meh, you probably are. Call it another secret, if you like. One of his," she added, giving Cole a hard stare. He shuffled back and stayed quiet. No, she wouldn't out Solas, and she'd be damned if she'd let anyone else do it either. Not yet.

"What did you forget?" Morrigan asked softly, watching as Solas spoke with the Sentinels. He

looked relaxed, no tension in his body language, but he'd put his hands behind his back. Always a wary sign with him. Or a superior one.

Carly finally looked away from the scene below to meet Morrigan's keen gaze. "Those are defensive towers, powerful magic that keeps this place safe. If we had not beaten Corypheus here, he would have triggered the towers himself. The ensuing explosion would have killed him – albeit temporarily – and all of the Sentinels down there."

"Temporarily?"

"He would have risen again. Varric and Hawke thought they'd killed him before, when he first escaped his prison. And yet, here he is. He's like an Archdemon when it comes down to it."

"I see."

"Now you know why I wanted to get here first."

Before Morrigan could reply, Carly looked down to see Solas turn back to them. He nodded slightly and she gave him a bright smile, which echoed faintly on his face. She went down the steps to join him and they walked across the bridge, the Sentinels falling in around them like the guardians they were.

"Knew you could do it."

"I *am* clever," he responded dryly. *I thought Fen'Harel was supposed to be clever*, she remembered tossing at him, all those months ago.

"Only on your good days." He still had his hands behind his back and she wondered what was going through his head. Nothing showed on his face, but she wondered if it was being here at all that was affecting him. "How old is the Temple, Solas?"

"I believe by your reckoning it is about 5000 years old," he said. "Perhaps older."

So way older than the Veil. He met her eyes briefly. That was a yes.

Their escort spread to either side of the massive gilded doors and took up positions of wariness, although not active hostility. She nodded politely to the one who had been leading them and he barely inclined his head back to her, then let them pass with a few words in Elvish that she couldn't hope to parse, they were so liquid and quick. Solas said something back that was equally too fast for her to follow.

"What did he say?" she asked as soon as they were inside the atrium. The doors closed heavily, then sealed, a sheen of magic running along the edges and flowing out like a barrier across it. Solas raised his eyebrow at her as if to say 'do you really need to ask?' "Oh, right. We're locked in unless we solve all the puzzles and we're allowed to use the Eluvian."

"Correct. It is time to add Elvish to your studies, I think."

"Yes, with all my abundant free time."

"We have the Fade."

"Fair." She put her hand on his arm, feeling the tension he carried even through his armor. "You all right?" *I'm figuring this is rough for you.*

His face softened, and she could see his jaw move as he consciously released it. "I am fine, vhenan. Do not worry for me."

"Okay. Shall we?"

He let her lead the way, flanking her with the other two behind them. The pathway was overgrown, and sunlight filtered through the ancient space, filling it with a haze that blurred the edges. They went into the sanctum and found the first of the supplicant puzzles.

"It appears the Temple's magics are still strong," Morrigan commented.

"Yes. Don't worry, I know what to do from here."

The Witch seemed affronted, and Solas made a noise. When she looked over her shoulder at him, he was struggling to keep a straight face. She shot him a quelling look and walked the puzzle, lighting up each square of the raised platform in the right order. The music it made chimed like bells. Solas drew in a sharp breath upon hearing it, but nothing slipped past his polite mask.

"Well done, vhenan," he said when she stepped down the stairs.

"Thank you. It's always polite to knock at the gate."

"Tis likely to hasten the path should we follow the order supplicants to Mythal did," Morrigan said. "Although after all this time, do we really believe a goddess dwells here?"

"You don't believe she was a god, Morrigan?" Carly asked.

"What is a god but a being of immense power? The dread Old Gods were nothing more than dragons, after all. They rise as Archdemons, and they die. I have seen it with my own eyes in Ferelden. Perhaps Mythal was nothing more than a powerful elf, a ruler among her kind. History often plays storyteller with facts, as you yourself have warned me."

"You admit your lack of knowledge, yet dismiss her so readily?" Solas asked. *Oh, here we go*, Carly thought. The pair of them simply couldn't help picking at each other, could they?

"I do not dismiss her," Morrigan snapped. "I merely question her supposed divinity. One need not be a god to have value. Truthfully I'm not certain she was even a single entity. The accounts are...varied."

"Hmm," Carly interjected before Solas could say anything. He looked annoyed.

"In most stories, Mythal rights wrongs while exercising a motherly kindness. Others paint her as dark, vengeful. Pray to her and she would smite your enemies, leaving them in agony."

"The oldest accounts say she was both of these, and neither," he said smoothly. "She was the mother, protective and fierce. But that is all I will say. This is not a place to stir up old stories."

Yeah, because you're in them, she thought with a grin in his direction. He scowled but it fell apart at her cheekiness. He shook his head at her faintly, amused in spite of himself.

"Whatever the truth, her fate has always been the same," Morrigan went on, oblivious to the battle of wills taking place next to her. "Exiled to the Beyond with her brethren."

"Exiled?" Carly asked, knowing she should to keep the conversation going. Funny how some things really were like the game.

“Tricked by the Dread Wolf, as all the elven gods were said to be. Trapped in a land beyond the Fade.” Carly offered Solas a look that plainly said 'see, I told you'. Morrigan continued, “Many Dalish believe this is why the elves fell from grace, and their gods did not save them. Or perhaps they were simply rulers slain by Tevinter. Who can say? I am curious about the guardians of this place, however. They are not Dalish. I wonder, could they be descendants of the ancient elves who once guarded this place from the time of Arlathan?”

“Perhaps. A fairly improbable happenstance if you ask me, though.”

“You have some insight to share, Inquisitor?”

“Not yet, Morrigan. C'mon, we should keep moving. My love is waiting for me.”

“And here I thought I stood,” Solas said lightly. She turned to him and grinned again, then raced up the stairs unerringly to the next courtyard, where his statue greeted them, twice as high as they were. She didn't bother to read the plaque she knew practically by heart and instead brushed the grit off the statue.

“Greetings, Rebel Wolf.”

Morrigan was quick on her heels, arriving before Cole and Solas, and managed to overhear her.

“Why is there a statue to Fen'Harel *here*? And why do you call him Rebel?”

“A better translation of 'harellen'. To the ancient elves it meant rebellion or opposition. It didn't take on the connotation of 'dread' until after the Dales fell.”

“I did not know you were such a student of history.”

“I'm not really, not how you're thinking. But admittedly, I have a good teacher, who can take me places no one sees anymore.” She saw Morrigan turn to eye Solas behind them. It wasn't quite a lie; he *did* take her to the Fade. She was starting to understand just how he managed his deceptive side.

“Of course, Somniari.” She turned back to Carly, a knowing look in her eye. “I do not think that is from whence your knowledge comes.”

“You're right about that. Someday I'll tell you all of it.”

“That still does not explain why 'tis here. It is as blasphemous as painting Andraste naked in the Chantry. Unless 'tis to warn against laxity towards the enemy.”

“For all your knowledge, Lady Morrigan, you simply cannot resist giving legend the weight of history,” Solas said. “The wise do not mistake one for the other.”

“Pray tell, what meaning does our elven 'expert' sense lurking behind this?” she retorted snidely.

“None we can discern by staring at it.”

“Children!” Carly snapped, making both of them glare at her while she snickered. “Can we move on before I make you wear a get along sweater? I swear, the pair of you are like bickering siblings.” Oh, now *that* was a fine tangle. The daughter of Flemeth, who carried the spark of Mythal, and the formerly bound advisor and general of the one time goddess, called to a body by her. It was enough to make her brain hurt, not to mention the urge to laugh at the ridiculousness was nearly irresistible. She doubted either of them would thank her for pointing it out, however.

“Mother, mother, sister, brother,” Cole said suddenly, apparently picking up on what she was feeling. “They are, aren't they?”

“No, Cole, not really. C'mon, there are more puzzles to get through.” Solas was giving her a look that spoke volumes and she just smiled and pulled him down to kiss his cheek. She whispered, “I promise, I'll stop as soon as you do.”

“You are infuriating.”

“I know, but you love me.”

“And for that, you are fortunate.” She stuck her tongue out at him and left his side before he could retaliate. One down, many more to go.

Chapter End Notes

I know, trying to describe walking the petitioner's path doesn't make for exciting reading without any fight sequences. It's the age old problem of moving characters from one side of the room to the other. But to be honest, I wanted to have all the dialogue included, because Solas and Morrigan squabbling like siblings is a whole ass Mood. (This also means that I ended up having to split this part into two chapters, otherwise we'd have been here all day.)

Let me know what you thought of it, feedback is always the lifeblood. Cheers!

PS - Y'all, we've broken 70K words. And *that's* exciting!

Ancient Sorrow

Chapter Notes

7/24/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Once the doors into the Hall of Shrines were open, Carly led the way with Solas on her heels. She looked up at the massive mosaics around them. "I didn't think they'd be so impressive in real life," she murmured. "Even knowing what I know, it's...awe-inspiring."

"The grandiose and the glittering. It has a way of covering over the largest sins."

She glanced at him. "I believe your words on the matter go something like 'any god who must boast of it is mad or lying'."

He gave her a smirk. "That does sound like something I would say."

"My humble wolf," she said, not teasing at all. The smirk grew into a real smile, as if he'd finally connected that she understood his nature. He didn't boast, he'd always preferred humility and the background. He'd never wanted to be the object of adulation, just acceptance. With his deeds so warped by mythology, all he'd gotten was reviled instead. Never by her, however. He leaned over and kissed her forehead.

"Thank you. For all your many kindnesses."

She snuggled into him for a moment, taking the time to recenter them both as Morrigan and Cole caught up. They broke apart and she looked at the others. "Another puzzle. Ugh, more dashing across squares."

"Carly," Solas chided mildly. She made a face at him.

"You do it then."

"*You* are the supplicant, vhenan."

"Fine," she huffed, but she smiled. This was the longest puzzle yet, carrying her across two levels and most of the broad courtyard. She was breathless by the time the chimes finally gave their final *whoosh* and the next set of doors opened.

"It wants to say something, but I can't hear it," Cole said presently. Carly suspected Solas had had a hand in designing these, and wondered if it was another supposed clue to his identity that she didn't actually need. She didn't want Cole picking that up, however, and put forth a supposition of her own to turn the thoughts aside.

"You're hearing the crypt," she said. "We aren't going that way. We don't need to bother the dead."

"A wise course," Morrigan said.

They continued on, barely peeking into the alcoves where all the gods were displayed. As much as

she enjoyed hearing Solas's words on what he knew about them, she didn't want to stay longer than they had to. Too many real lives were at stake. When they finally reached the last room, she slowed, making sure they were all in a group before Abelas appeared.

“‘Tis not what I expected,” Morrigan murmured, half to herself. “I wonder what this chamber was used for...”

Carly heard the rattle of armor behind her, and even though it made the hair on the back of her neck stand on end, she didn't turn to look at the Sentinels. “They're here.”

She looked to the higher level and saw Abelas watching them. “Venavis,” he said. “You are not like other invaders. You are one of our own, and you bear the mark of magic which is...familiar.”

Right, this ought to be interesting, she thought. Solas grunted.

“How is this come to pass?” Abelas went on. “Why do you disturb our slumber?”

“Ar'an andaran atish'an, Abelas,” Solas said. “Ahead of those that would defile it.”

“Fen'Harel ma ghilana, da'len,” Abelas said switching his focus, his golden eyes intense on her. Shit. Carly hoped Morrigan's grasp of Elvish was more Dalish, and she would only translate that as its now common usage rather than anything more...literal.

“We seek to preserve this sacred space, hahren,” she replied. “The one pursuing us will only destroy it, and all of you. I don't want that to happen.”

“You seek the Vir'Abelasan?”

“In a manner of speaking.” *I need Morrigan to drink from it.* She heard Solas's intake of breath, but didn't spare him a glance. “The way must be prepared to defeat this enemy, who cannot be killed by normal means.”

“It is not *for* you, it is not for *any* of you.”

“Solas, anything you got that would convince him?”

“You know I have nothing I can say that will sway him, vhenan,” he whispered in her ear. “Not without giving all of it away. He has stood watch on this place for millennia, and knows no other purpose in a world as foreign to him as it is to me.” She watched Abelas's eyes narrow at them. “Your best hope for success is the path you already followed.”

“Well, that *is* kinda why I did it.”

He almost snorted. “Of course it is.”

“Enough,” Abelas interrupted them. “You trespass here, but you have followed the rites of petition. You have shown respect to Mythal. If this other is an enemy to us both, we will aid you in overcoming him. When this is done, you shall be permitted to depart. And never return.”

“Consider carefully, Inquisitor, he makes no mention of allowing you to use the Vir'Abelasan, which I assume is your goal.”

“We will not fight these Sentinels, Morrigan. We come in peace here, and in peace we shall leave.” She turned back to the ancient elf. “We will abide. May we approach?”

He nodded. “You will be guided to the aid you seek. As for the Vir'Abelasan, it will not be

despoiled, even if I must destroy it myself.”

“Don't, Morrigan,” Carly said sharply before the Witch could say anything. “It won't come to that.” Morrigan gave her an outraged glare and took off after Abelas anyway, shifting into a bird and flying out of sight. “Dammit.”

“Did you expect better?” Solas asked scornfully.

“She turned into a bird,” Cole said, the wonder in his voice distracting her for a moment.

“I had hoped she'd be more reasonable. Oh well. C'mon, it's a long walk but if it goes the way it should, she won't do anything stupid before we get there.”

Carly stopped for a moment to look up at his mosaic when they reached the hall of them. Solas lit the veilfire and stood behind her, holding the torch up high so she could see it better. The guide didn't appear in any hurry, and she didn't speak, but Carly wondered if she was curious as to why this Dalish stood at the portrait of Fen'harel, or if it was obvious from her vallaslin. Carly smiled at the glittering eyes shining in the veilfire light.

“Is it a good likeness?” she asked flippantly.

“No,” he replied.

“Guess I'll have to take your word for it unless you care to give me better evidence someday.”

“You are a strange woman, vhenan.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Come, we mustn't keep our guide waiting, nor should we linger too long.”

“You're right.” She turned away from the mosaic and met his silver blue eyes, noting that the portrait had the color exactly copied. She took his hand in hers and he let her. They followed the guide through the empty halls and chambers until they reached the Well. It was strange to go through the sanctuary without fighting anyone, but she wouldn't have changed it for anything. With any luck, Corypheus wouldn't attack at all.

“It's loud. And so cold,” Cole said as they walked into the fresh air again of the innermost sanctum. The Well even called to her, which was odd since she wasn't really elven. It was like a hum in the back of her mind. It would have been disquieting except that she knew why it sounded that way.

The memories of all her servants, she thought.

“And others,” Solas murmured.

“Are you in there?”

“No, I am not. Giving the memories to the Well only happened at the point of death.”

“But there is knowledge of you in there, I would assume.”

“Probably.”

“I might have to tell her, ma fen.”

“Do you really want her to be the one to drink from it?”

“Would you prefer it be me? I know it won't be you.” He made a face, equal parts resignation and frustration. “It has to be this way. For later on.”

“I do not like it.”

“I know. But do you trust me to know what I'm doing?”

“I do.” She kissed him, lightly and quick, and went up the stairs to where Morrigan and Abelas stood, locked in a stalemate.

“Morrigan, hold!” she commanded, and was a bit surprised when the Witch did. She turned to Abelas. “Please, may we speak?”

“Do you even know what it is you ask?”

“Yes, hahren, I do. Please.” He nodded and let her lead him to a quieter corner, where they wouldn't be overheard. “Abelas, you shed your name once when you entered the service of Mythal. You shed it again and became known for your sorrow when she died. I am asking you now to allow this, because the spark that remains will need her daughter. As I do, and all of creation does right now.”

His eyes lit on Morrigan standing some distance away. “You know things you should not, da'len.”

“Yes, a lot of things. More than you, even.” Now Abelas's gaze settled on Solas before it moved to her vallaslin, and Carly nodded. “Yeah, him too.”

“How do you come to walk at the Wolf's side, written freely with his mark?”

“It's a very long story, and I can only tell it if we all get out of here alive.”

“You have shown respect to Mythal, and there is a righteousness in you I cannot deny. Is that your desire, to partake of the Vir'Abelasan as best you can, to defeat your enemy?”

“Yes, hahren. I do not ask this lightly.”

“It may be too much for a mortal to comprehend.”

“I know. Her path already treads close to that which is not mortal. If we want to survive Corypheus and keep him from entering the Fade to rewrite reality, we *need* the wisdom held in the Well.”

He was silent for a moment, thinking it through. Finally, he nodded and walked back to Morrigan. “Brave it if you must, but know you this, you will forever be bound to the will of Mythal.”

“Bound to a goddess who no longer exists, if she ever did?”

Carly caught Solas's eye and shook her head. *She doesn't know.*

“Bound, as we all are,” Abelas stated. “The choice is yours.”

“Will you be leaving the temple?” Carly asked.

“Our duty ends with this act. Why remain?”

“Join us at Tarasyl'an Tel'as, hahren. I will still have need of wise counsel around me, and...we have need of reminders of what came before.”

Again his eyes slid to Solas before coming back to hers. “We will stay long enough to secure the sanctuary from entry. From there, I make no promises. I would prefer a place untouched by shemlen if I could find it.”

It would have to do. “Morrigan, you may drink. And then we will leave, as we said we would.”

“I did not expect the Well to feel so *hungry*,” she said, staring blankly at the ripples.

“Wisdom often hungers for more. Go, but be careful.”

Morrigan stepped into the water and then bent down to submerge herself in it. Carly waited, knowing it wouldn't take long.

“You are certain?” Solas asked.

“I am. Besides, it's too late to change it.” She turned her back as the Well's water rushed out around them, shielding her eyes from the spray. When the wave disappeared, she saw Morrigan waking from the ground.

“I am...intact. There is much to sift through.”

“Yes, there is. We should go. Time's getting short.” They gathered themselves up and Carly pretended she didn't overhear Solas talking to Abelas about finding a new name. She didn't want to draw anyone else's attention to the fact that they were acquainted. Instead, she watched as Morrigan activated the Eluvian, just as she had her own now safely tucked away in the deepest recesses of Skyhold. The party passed through it, and Carly felt a sense of accomplishment that at least with this, she had averted disaster. Once they reached the nearest Inquisition outpost, she sent word of their success to Cullen and his scouts and began the journey back home.

Chapter End Notes

Venavis – no direct translation, but I think in this context it means 'halt' or 'desist'

Ar'an andaran atish'an – 'we come in peace to this place'

Fen'Harel ma ghilana – 'the Dread Wolf guides you', common Dalish curse meaning you're an idiot, but in this case quite literal

Vir'Abelasan – the Well of Sorrows

Most of this is in game Elvish, the rest is courtesy of Project Elvhen.

Melt With You

Chapter Notes

7/28/20

Be advised, this chapter contains a potentially lethal amount of fluff. I have no remorse for this.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Ar lasa mala revas, you are free, you are so beautiful. You keep waiting for it, but he has not done it, and you have asked only once.” Cole was slouched on the floor at her feet next to the comfy sofa in her chamber facing the empty fireplace. She peered across the space between them at his golden head, for once visible without his hat. “It doesn't happen in this version.”

“God, I hope not.”

“You would not be free?”

“Cole, I *am* free. I always was. I chose to wear these marks. *He's* choosing to let me.” She placed her bookmark and closed the huge – mostly inaccurate – book of Dalish history, looking down to see what the spirit was doing. Fiddling with his boots.

“Why won't they stay? Can you ask them for me?” His voice was plaintive and she hid a smile.

She slid off the sofa to kneel in front of him, tying the laces with a deft hand. “They can't hear you, they aren't alive.”

“They were once.”

“The flax in the fibers was once, yes. But not anymore. Now it's just twine and string. You have to tie them yourself.”

“The weight of all on you,” he said then. She wondered at the sudden topic change, but then didn't, because it was Cole and *linear* wasn't in his vocabulary. “All the hopes you carry, fears you fight. You are theirs. When are you yours?”

She sat back on her heels and looked at her favorite spirit. Now the topic didn't seem so roundabout. He had circled back to questioning whether or not she was free. “I am mine right now, Cole. I am mine when I make decisions, regardless of their weight.” She heard the lower door open and close and smiled to herself. “And I am especially mine when I'm with him.”

“He comes, soft, silent, stirring a bowl?” He raised questioning blue eyes at her. “So much love and laughter is there. You are real.”

She nodded and patted his knee as she stood up. “Sounds like dinner will be on the hearth tonight.”

“What is love like, Carly?” The question was curious and innocent but she'd been waiting for it. Usually around this time in the game, he understood fully what he was. His questions would take on a different tone from here on out, more pointed, less befuddling. And if this had been the

game...soon he would be asking Solas why he'd turned away. She had to trust that wasn't going to happen now.

“Exhilarating, frustrating, delightful. It's the little moments of quiet balanced by the big moments of emotion so overwhelming you want to cry.”

“Touch, take and tear. Hot breath and hard hands.”

“Hey, don't read so deep. It's impolite.”

“Why does it hurt? I want to help.”

She cupped Cole's cheek in her palm, feeling so much less buzzing in his skin now that he was comfortable in it. Solas had protected him from being bound, and he was free as any spirit could wish to be in the waking world. “Sweetie, hurt is part of love too. It's the worry, concern and fear that it will end. The world we walk isn't one where things are assured for happy ever after. This isn't a fairy tale. It's not the kind of pain you can heal by making me forget it's there.”

“But why?”

“Because you can't know how much joy you can hold until you know how much sorrow you need to fill. You can't have one without the other.” She heard slow steps on her stairs and went to lean on the railing.

Solas was indeed carrying a bowl that he stirred occasionally as he walked, along with a basket slung over his arm that appeared to contain enough tasty things for a cozy meal for two. She watched him, feeling an inordinate amount of silly pleasure. All he was missing was an apron. “Well aren't you a regular Martha Stewart this evening.”

“Who?”

“A celebrity cook back on Earth. Never mind. Cole is still here, visiting.”

“Hello, Cole,” Solas said when he set down the dinner things at her desk. “How are you feeling?”

“Wiser.”

“That is a good thing to feel.”

“Carly was telling me about love.” Solas jerked a little at that, but by the time he turned to her, his face was set in the usual sly calm that he wore around her. It either meant he was feeling devilish or playful and either way she loved it.

“She is a good person to learn it from,” he said before he dipped his head and kissed her in front of the spirit. Somehow he managed to impart a sense of unraveling carnal intent in the otherwise chaste kiss and even before he nipped her lip as he pulled away she was a slightly dazed puddle. He chuckled under his breath. “She's a very good person to learn it from.”

“Heartbeat like a hammer, heat from...”

“Out, sweetie. I love you, but out.” The spirit disappeared like a puff of smoke and she grabbed a hold of the jawbone to tug Solas back to her. “C'mere you.”

He held her tight this time, fingers working into her hair, loosening pins to ping on the floor while his mouth devoured hers. The hand on the jawbone was crushed between them, and the other was

around the back of his head, holding him close. She had an urge to jump on him like she usually did, but she resisted. They'd never eat dinner. He released her by degrees and when he opened his eyes again, the silver blue was nearly lost in the blown pupils.

"Nice to see I have the same effect on you," she managed. "I've missed you all day, where were you?"

"I had business to attend to."

"Rebel business?"

He smiled. "I suppose you could call it that."

She knew he had spies, and she knew he should be working to shore up his control of the Eluvian network, so she didn't ask. He'd tell her when he was ready. "What did you bring for dinner?"

"The last of the fresh pears, the batter for hearth cakes and a strawberry wine that I managed to find in the market."

"Sounds very romantic. What brought this on?"

Solas laid out the utensils and the flat pan that had apparently been hiding at the bottom of the basket and started setting himself up at the fireplace, layering small pieces of wood before igniting them. Truly, it was warm enough that she hadn't needed the fire lately, but she figured she could stand it for cooking purposes.

"We have not spend much time indulging in quiet, vhenan. You need it."

She sat on the sofa and leaned forward to rest her forehead against his back between his shoulders. Just as she knew he would, he leaned back, supporting her weight. "I just need you, ma fen. The rest of the world can hang."

He huffed a laugh and pushed her back a little so she sat back up. "I need some quiet too. And I thought your entire object here was not to let the world hang."

"Hey, I can dream, can't I?"

"Soon, my love. Soon enough it will be over, will it not?"

"Yeah." She lounged on the sofa and watched her exceedingly many years old boyfriend cook what was essentially flapjacks on her hearth. It was surreal and endearing simultaneously and she couldn't remember the last time she was so happy.

"Will you slice the pears, vhenan?"

"And open the wine?"

"If you like."

She smiled at his bent head and got up from the sofa, finding a wicked little knife tucked in a cloth. There was something else there too, a small square tucked into the very bottom on the basket. She pulled it out and saw it was wrapped in a fine layer of silk.

"What's this?" she asked, holding it up to show him.

"Something for you." He turned back to the hearth while she unwrapped it and she bit her lip when

she saw what he'd done.

It was a portrait, drawn exquisitely from a single memory. A memory she'd used on him with anger still in her heart. And he'd turned it into this. Tears pricked her eyes as she ran her fingertips lightly over her parents' faces, the details almost as fine as the photograph had been. "Solas..."

"Is it good?"

"When did you...?" The tears streamed freely down her cheeks now and he left the fireplace to hold her and wipe them away.

"I've been working on it since we returned from Halamshiral. I wanted to make sure I got it right. If you cannot return to that place, you should have them here."

"Thank you, vhenan. Thank you so much. I'll have to find a frame for it."

"Da'banal," he whispered against her hair. He went back to the hearth to cook and she put the portrait down to cut the pears. The little knife made short work of the ripe fruit and she piled the slices into the bowl he'd brought them in, bringing the whole thing back to the fireplace to lounge again while he cooked. She uncorked the bottle and poured for each of them into wooden cups. He took a slice of pear when she offered it and flipped the cooking cakes with a precision she wasn't sure why she was surprised at. Everything he did had economic grace in it.

Even when he broke the cooked hearth cake apart and fed her with his own hands. That too had a grace that belied the strength she knew was there. The light toasted flavor melted in her mouth, and following it with pear slices and the strawberry wine made it all the more heavenly. All of it on top of his gift made her feel like she might cry again. "Thank you for breakfast for dinner, Solas."

He smiled and turned back to the hearth to cook the last one of the stack. "Consider it a gift of thanks for preserving the Temple."

"As if a picture of my parents isn't enough. Is that for saving a piece of your heritage or for the fifty or so Elvhen who didn't die needless deaths?"

"I have to choose?" he shot over his shoulder with a raised eyebrow.

She leaned forward and bumped his shoulder. He turned on his knees and kissed her, slow and deep, bone melting. Her arms automatically went around his neck to keep him close. "Okay, I'll take both."

"As you should. You kept a terrible evil from occurring. I am no longer a servant to Mythal's will, but that does not mean I wish to see her sacred places fall to ruin and destruction. So I thank you."

"You're very welcome, my love. Now come cuddle with me if you're all done cooking."

"Is that all you want?"

She grinned at his playful tone. "For now. The rest can come later."

He tidied up the cooking things and added a larger log to the fire before he nudged her aside to let him get on the sofa with her. She settled between his outstretched legs, her head on his chest, his arms around her, holding her secure. She watched the fire and listened to him hum something under his breath. It took her a minute to recognize it, but when she did, she nearly broke the spell by laughing. She didn't even remember playing that in her head to keep him from dipping.

I'll stop the world and melt with you...

At some point, she must have fallen asleep, for when she woke, they were in bed and it was morning. He'd put the portrait on her bedside table where she would see it first thing. She snuggled deeper into his arms and just looked at it, counting her lucky stars.

Chapter End Notes

In case you're interested in reading about Cole's mission, it can be found here:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/23789257/chapters/61317433#workskin>

The Truth Will Out

Chapter Notes

7/31/20

Carly was in the Great Hall for a change, sitting down at a long table eating lunch with the rest and enjoying herself. Solas wasn't in Skyhold at the moment, and the rest of the companions were busy teasing her about missing him. She let them get away with it, knowing she couldn't explain that their resident elf mage was back in Halamshiral attaining the key to Briala's portion of the Eluvian network. She saw Morrigan approaching, her normally unflappable face set in a worried expression.

Kieran went into the Eluvian, she thought, speaking of mirrors. She considered the timeline, and knew she was right. Okay then, time to meet Mythal.

"Inquisitor, might I have a moment of your time?"

"Certainly, Morrigan," Carly said, wiping her mouth and standing up. "Kieran's run off, hasn't he?"

The woman frowned at her. "Tis uncanny how you do that. And most unlike my son to do this."

"Yeah, I know. C'mon, let's get moving. We'll find him, don't worry."

They strode through the keep and down to where Morrigan stored her massive Eluvian, glowing faintly and almost pulsing like a living thing. It was mildly unnerving. They stepped through, the travel feeling more sludgy than normal and emerged into a stony grotto that glowed green.

"This is the Fade," Morrigan said. "To turn an Eluvian's course here would require immense power. How did he do this?"

Carly put a hand on the Witch's arm. "Urthemiel, Morrigan."

"He's never done anything like this before..."

"I know this isn't going to sound right, but what's about to happen here is necessary. I don't want you to worry for Kieran, he'll be perfectly fine."

"You know what we will find here, do you not?" Morrigan asked, swinging around to meet her gaze. A number of things were visible in her expression, curiosity, a little awe, more than a little fear for her son.

"I do."

"How?"

Carly sighed. It was time to tell her all of it. "Morrigan, I really *am* from another world, where this is all a piece of fiction that I've experienced multiple times. I know *exactly* how all these events play out, and yeah, I do know everyone's secrets. I have both seen you to drink from the Well and drunk from it myself in the past. I have known Kieran both as the vessel of Urthemiel and just a

little boy. I've even known instances where he didn't exist at all." She gripped Morrigan's arm tighter, drawing her focus back. "I know what's really going on here, and how to change it for the better."

"You knew the elven legends are wrong, and you knew why," Morrigan said, wonderingly.

"Yeah. C'mon, we're wasting time. Let's find them."

"Them?"

"Kieran is with Flemeth."

"I'll kill her," Morrigan ground out and took off down the pathway at a run. Carly just followed and kept her thoughts to herself.

Kieran snapped his fingers and the blue glow between he and Flemeth extinguished. He turned to them, his eyes bright. "Mother!"

Morrigan, of course, could only stare at Flemeth. "Mother."

"Now," Flemeth said, getting back to her feet. "Isn't this a surprise? Welcome to the family reunion, little halla."

"Um...thanks, I think," Carly said.

"I do not understand," Morrigan said helplessly.

"Tell her," Flemeth said to Carly, her voice compelling.

"How much?"

Flemeth gave her a knowing and appreciative grin. "Enough of it." *That* wasn't loaded at all, and Carly narrowed her eyes at Flemeth, who laughed. "I do love a little halla with spirit. You do the People proud, da'len, even though you are not one of them."

She hadn't expected the praise, since she *had* expected that the spark of Mythal would know immediately that she wasn't Dalish. It was hard to parse what her feelings were on it. She turned her attention to the command instead. "Morrigan, your mother carries the spark of Mythal. Consult the voices of the Well, you'll know it's the truth."

A complicated expression crossed Morrigan's face and when she opened her eyes, they were softer than Carly had ever seen them, putting things into perspective and their proper place in the grand scheme of things. "You *are* Mythal. How?"

Flemeth nodded regally. "Once I was just a woman, and she came to me, heeded my call after betrayal and ruination. I have provided her spark a vessel ever since."

At a touch from his grandmother, Kieran crossed the space to hug his mother. "What does that have to do with Kieran?"

"Morrigan," Carly said softly. "Do you want him to be an old god baby forever, or just a little boy? She can help."

"Old god baby?" Flemeth cackled. "Is that what they call him in your world? That's delightful."

"I will not let you hurt him, old crone."

"So dramatic. He has no need of this power anymore, Morrigan. I can lift it from him without harm."

"And in turn prepare him for your own possession. She extends her life this way, Inquisitor."

Carly shook her head. It wasn't her place to tell Morrigan what Mythal planned to do with the spark of Urthemiel. Flemeth was watching her, shrewd gaze looking through her with eyes that gleamed and glowed very like she one day expected to see on Solas.

"You *know* what he plans," the old woman whispered.

"The cost is high, All-Mother. To both of you. I'd really rather not go through it with him."

"What are you two talking about?" Morrigan asked, her voice strained.

"Let me look at you, child." Flemeth beckoned to her and she went willingly, allowing the goddess to peer through her memories, sifting delicately like turning pages. The armored gloves whispered on her face as Flemeth cradled her head, but it was gentle. "Ahh, you are a worthy halla to his wolf. Look at you. You hold much sway over my wayward Pride."

"Pride? *Solas*? What does he have to do with any of this?" Morrigan burst out, her impatience to know winning over her distrust of her mother.

"You have not told her," Flemeth said to Carly. "You have not told any of them."

"It's not my secret to tell."

The old woman smiled, warm and motherly. Carly understood then what Solas meant, she was mother and protector, loving and fierce. And yet, still imperfect. "I made a fine choice. You'll do," she said enigmatically. "Come, Morrigan, make your decision. Shall I take the old god from your son and release him, or shall he remain as he is?"

"You will release him? You will not take him from me?"

"I will not."

"Then take the spark. Leave me my son."

Kieran went back to Flemeth's side and Carly stepped away, wanting no part of the ritual near her. She went back to Morrigan's side, offering silent support as she watched her mother pull the old god from her son. "It's going to be okay, Morrigan."

"You knew," the Witch murmured. "You knew all of it."

"Yeah, I did."

"Why did you not tell me sooner?"

"Would you have believed me?"

Morrigan scoffed, although it seemed aimed at herself. "Perhaps not." The blue glowing spark hung in the air between Kieran and Flemeth before the old woman absorbed it, leaving the boy untouched any further by magic he didn't need. "I would still like to know what Solas has to do with any of this."

“Long story, not mine to tell,” Carly said. “But I *can* tell you, that spark won't go to waste, and it won't stay in your mother, nor will she use it to control you or Kieran.”

Morrigan turned to her as Flemeth finished the ritual. “She will give it to him. Why?”

“Because he'll need it. Someday.”

Kieran ran to his mother and she swept him into her embrace. “Are we done here?”

“Almost.” Flemeth's eyes flared and a burst of power split between her and her daughter. Morrigan staggered but didn't fall. “Corypheus must be defeated. I give to you the knowledge and power to do so.”

Dragon form, Carly thought.

Flemeth nodded to her daughter as she released her. “Go now, Morrigan, and be with your son. You, little halla. Tarry a moment.”

“If you like.”

Flemeth waited until Morrigan and Kieran had disappeared before speaking. “You must consider, very carefully. A choice is yet before the Dread Wolf. The Veil must fall, as it grows weak and will not survive no matter what comes. But if he intends to restore the past, he will lose you into the bargain.”

“Why?”

“Without the need for this, you will never be drawn here.”

“You're telling me I have to make him choose between his life's work and giving it up for love.” She made a disparaging face at the ancient goddess housed in a human vessel. “I thought fairy tales weren't real. Not to mention, I know most of those fairy tales didn't originally have happy endings.”

Flemeth laughed. “So strong in the face of this knowledge, so useful a ploy to hide your heart's deepest fear. Wit and scorn are tools, da'len, do not make them a crutch. You have found the wisdom once more in my pride. Do not let him forsake it. The others should not be released, under any circumstances. Not as they are now. Nor should this world be rewritten to fix what he thinks was broken beyond repair. You know there is another way, and you have come far in leading him to see it. Do not falter now.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“There is a choice yet before *you*, little halla. One that you think you have made, but it has not yet presented itself when it matters.”

“You mean whether I go back to my world or stay here.”

Flemeth stroked her cheek, tucked a loose strand of her hair behind her ear, lingering on the point of it. “Yes.”

“I *have* made that choice. I love him, and I won't give up on him.”

“Regret should have no place in a god's soul. But you and I both know that we were not gods in truth. I have many. He is not one of them, but his path is. I give him unto your keeping.”

Carly smiled ruefully at her, sad that even after all this time, the ancient spark didn't get it. “He

isn't mine to keep like a bauble, Mythal. That's the part you Evanuris never understood. Freedom of choice is the right of all thinking beings. If he wants me, I will stay. If he does not, I won't compel him. Consent is a thing, you know."

Flemeth laughed. "You are prepared to pave a new order onto this world, Carly Mayers. You will not stray from that, I think. My blessing is upon you." Flemeth kissed her forehead and let her go.

"One last thing..."

"Yes?" the ancient spark looked out through Flemeth's eyes, her gaze knowing but hard. Impatient.

"Make sure you save a bit of...yourself. I don't know how much I can change, and if he thinks he's killed you, he'll be all the more difficult to turn from this path."

Flemeth nodded. "I will think on this. Now, go, little halla. This is not a place you should linger." She turned and disappeared into the fog of the Fade.

Carly went back to the Eluvian and emerged into Skyhold to see Morrigan still holding Kieran tight in her embrace. The boy was grinning, the normal light of a child in his eyes. She'd managed to change a lot of things. This was one thing she was glad to have kept the same.

"Morrigan, we should speak."

The Witch looked up and nodded. "We should, Inquisitor. But not now, if you please. There is much to consider."

"That's fair. You know where to find me."

"I do."

I Take You As You Are

Chapter Notes

8/4/20

Is it time for more headcannon glitter? I think so.

Also, OMG, thank you dear readers, you have tipped this fic over 10K hits. Thank you all, from the bottom of my heart.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Even after so many months, Carly still did not understand how the Fade worked, but she wasn't going to complain about the place she'd entered in her dream. The floor glittered with inlaid gold and she could sense rather than see the spires and towers that surrounded her. She didn't need the curious spirits who followed her footsteps to tell her where she was; she was asleep in her bed at Skyhold, there was only one logical conclusion to make.

“Tarasyl'an Te'las,” she murmured, knowing that name wasn't quite right. This place was golden and bright, not yet consigned to its final fate. The spirits and wisps around her buzzed with near speech, excited like puppies. They couldn't give her the kind of information she wanted, however. But she had a thought. She knew what he'd done here had taken a lot of determination and effort. Time. Obligation, legitimate or otherwise. She remembered what he'd said about how spirits were formed and smiled.

“Is there a Purpose here?” she called out into the Fade construct. A coalescing spiral of light danced up to her and she grinned at it. It tried to take on a form she'd recognize and she shook her head before it got much further than being his height. “Don't bother, please. Can you find the Wolf for me and bring him here?”

The spirit took off, both seeming to disappear and to race down the broad corridor in which she stood simultaneously. She walked to the windows overlooking the same view she saw from her balcony while she waited, figuring it wouldn't be long.

And she was right, although what she heard approaching wasn't what she expected. Clicks on the golden tiles made her turn and there he was. Massive, his fur the deepest black she'd seen on any animal, eyes – all six of them – glowing red until he saw her, recognized her. The fiery light faded, leaving behind a single pair in silver blue that she would know anywhere. She snorted.

“I really need to learn to be more specific, don't I?”

He tilted his head at her, almost quizzical, and she gave up trying not to laugh. He padded to her side, standing as tall as her chest and she bent over until they were at eye level.

“Hello, ma fen. Never has that been more appropriate.” She leaned in and kissed the end of his snout. He morphed like water, like smoke, and leaned back on his heels as soon as he was able, his face a combination of mock disgust and a rapidly failing attempt to hide a smile.

“No respect, Dalish,” he chided.

She knelt towards him, knowing he'd catch her before she toppled. "Bite me, elf."

His lips met hers with a brush before he gathered her into his arms and burrowed into her neck, his teeth closing on his favorite spot. She shivered and let out a happy sigh. When he pulled back, he was eyeing her with his sly smirk. "How did you get here?"

"Kinda fell into it." She looked around as they stood up, although they didn't let go of each other. "Once I realized where I was, I knew I wanted you here. They're very nice," she gestured to the cloud of spirits around them, each giving off an aura of being quite happy to have company, "but they can't exactly give me a tour."

He raised a brow at her. "And how did you summon me, then?"

She bit her lip, then snickered. "Solas, did you know you're kind of a father?"

"What?" He was equal parts aghast and shocked and she put her hand on his chest, holding him steady.

"There was a spirit of purpose trying to take your shape. I asked it to find you."

"That is not how..."

"From everything I've ever heard you say on the matter, that's *exactly* how it works, my love. You were driven to do what was necessary. You left an impression of your intentions, I imagine."

"You do realize that to most it would have manifested as a demon? Considering my state of mind when I...lived here."

"You told me once, in the game, that spirits form themselves to our expectations and adapt accordingly. If I'd expected a demon, that's what it would have been. I expected spirits, and look at them all." She stepped back from him to let him see the corridor teeming with wisps and spirits and not a one with malicious intent among them. Something changed in his eyes, something so light and pure her breath stopped in her throat. It utterly transformed his face into something younger and *freer*.

He drew her close again, tucked her in tight to his chest. "You are entirely unique, ma vhenan. I have never known anyone other than myself to take the Fade at such simple face value without prejudice since before the Veil. I did not make these spirits. You brought them to you."

"But..."

He chuckled at her surprise. "They were already here? Your sleeping mind called to them before you set foot here."

She shook her head. "Okay, that just got way too existential for me. I just wanted to see this place."

"Why?"

She curled against him. "No single act of your life had more importance or impact than what you did here. Of course I would want to see it."

He kissed her forehead. "I do not deserve you."

"Sure you do. Everyone deserves to be taken as they are." She smoothed a hand across his chest, feeling his sweater against her palm as if it was real. It was amazing to her how faithful the dream

could be. “How's Halamshiral treating you?”

“I am nearly finished there.”

“Good, I miss you.” She looked around again, giving him some time to compose himself. She knew what she was asking of him. “So what was it, before?”

He looked with her, beholding the gilded trappings of the world that had been lost. “It was a Vir Ghil'an, a meeting place for counsel and guidance to the People. Elvhenan was vast, and the Evanuris could not be in all places at once. This was a reasonably central location for two portions of the empire, as it remains today.”

“And it was also remote enough that the magic you made here wouldn't do much damage to the surroundings if you catastrophically failed,” she theorized aloud.

He squeezed her close, his face serious as he nodded. “It was also mine.” He paused, drawing back to look her in the eye. “Are you certain you wish to see this memory? It is not so lovely as this spot.”

“Solas, it's a part of you. Show me,” she entreated.

He gathered himself, calming whatever emotion was liable to affect the wisps and took her hand. The Fade shifted around them without them having to move at all. The chamber, when it resolved into clarity, was still gilded and vast, but it was enclosed, underground. At the center was a raised circular dais, the spokes of some unknown material pointed upwards like branches. They glinted with threads of lyrium. Within that circle was a pillar of plain stone, and atop that sat a familiar orb. It too shone with lyrium, but it was muted as if it was inactive.

Like it's empty, or dead.

He said nothing, and if he heard the thought he gave no sign. He was watching the memory play out intently and she focused back on it to see the doors opposite from them open, the sound of twisting hinges and stout wood so normal in the otherwise abnormal space that it was surreal. And there he was, so much younger, so much more vibrant. He stalked to the dais with an energy she rarely saw him use now. Dark robes billowed around him, stirred by the wind of his walking. They were austere, she noted, more brown than black. Unadorned by decoration or ornament. Faint blue light from the lyrium glinted off his scalp, bald then as it was now. She risked a glance up to his face and saw him look at his younger self, his eyes full of something remarkably like regret. She twined her fingers in his.

The Fade Solas put his hands on the orb and it began to glow, first blue, then green as he drew the Fade around himself and into it. “*Such things were foci, said to channel power from our gods. Some were dedicated to specific members of our pantheon.*” His words were plain in her head as she watched this angry and grieving younger version transmit himself into the orb, filling it to brimming with his power.

The orb began to send out tendrils of arcing light, connecting to the lyrium spokes until he was surrounded by a glowing mass of power, contained but growing. *Like a Faraday cage*, she thought. The ground began to shake around them, although she couldn't feel it. The gilt covering the walls peeled away, revealing the stone underneath, carved with runes of every shape and size. And still he pulled on the Fade, drew it into him and out through his hands on the orb, feeding the spell he cast. A crack formed under their feet, although they didn't fall into it. It chased itself around the perimeter of the chamber, growing wider and deeper with every second. She could hear water.

The Fade Solas's eyes turned red, and his lips pulled back from his teeth. His face grew unrecognizable as he worked, the shape of it twisting and loosing coherency as the Fade spilled out around him. Additional eyes opened, giving her a hint of his demon form. The arcs of magic were tinged with purple now, the color of pride's electricity.

With a wave of concussive force, the earth began to lift, leaving him as the eye of the storm. And yet, the vision of it was clear to Carly as she watched. The mountain must have trembled as the meeting place rose off it. She imagined the earthquake it caused could be felt for miles.

Gradually, the force of the rising structure dissipated, although she assumed that was because it was being pushed from the waking world into the Fade, forever to hang in a false sky. The Fade Solas was leaning crookedly against the pillar now, heaving for air as if he'd run a marathon. He gathered himself for his last act and her fingers clenched on his modern counterpart, waiting for what she knew was coming.

A flash of green, a wave of light that burst off the orb in every direction. It blinded her, searing and brilliant, and then it was gone as fast as lightning. In its wake there was a sound, a low rumble not unlike thunder. The sound dissipated too, becoming a backdrop pulse before it faded away to silence.

"The Veil," she whispered.

He didn't answer, and she wondered if he even knew she was still there. Certainly his hand was slack in hers. The Fade Solas slumped as the power of his spell took hold, cutting him off from the source of his strength. He was himself again. He stumbled as he left the chamber, leaning heavily against the doors, his feet tripping on the broken stones beneath them. The orb remained, glowing softly, green flames licking around the curves and spirals carved into it. Eventually even that turned dark and what remained of the foundations settled around them, now empty and flat. Just the memory of the power unleashed here had made the wisps and spirits flee from the scene and it was only the two of them.

"Is that what you wanted to see?" Solas asked, his voice raspy.

She burrowed against him, her arms clinging around his cold body as if she could impart her own warmth to him as he had done so many times to her. She didn't break the silence of the memory, didn't ask any questions or hurl any snark. The woman she'd been when she arrived in Thedas would have, she knew. And the man he was then would have probably taken the Anchor forcibly from her and left her to die. But they weren't those people anymore.

It took a long time, but eventually he seemed to come back to himself, came back to the realization that she'd meant what she said. She would not turn away. His arms finally wrapped around her and he held her so tight she couldn't breathe.

"Wake up," he whispered. And the dream was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Vir Ghil'an - Place of Guidance, a name of my own creation. I know a lot of people think the Black City was the site of Arlathan, but I've never thought so myself, mostly because elves were still living in it for a couple thousand years post Veil - if we go with the idea that the Veil is what caused elves to become mortal (somewhere around

2850 Ancient). Skyhold is a remote mountaintop in the Frostbacks. I expect the seat of Elvhen power was far more centralized, probably closer to modern day Tevinter, since there is a forest by the same name in that area. That being said, Elvhenan extended throughout what is now Thedas, and even with travel by Eluvian, far flung regions would need their own cities and gathering places. Also, I imagine that Tarasyl'an Telas didn't become known that way, nor was it revered as a holy place, until after Solas did his thing there. We *do* know for certain that he considered that land his.

Let me know what you think. Come holler at me here or over on tumblr. I'm cracklamb there too.

Sacrificial Pieces

Chapter Notes

8/7/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Tiebreaker?” Carly taunted to Bull, who scowled at her.

He nodded and briskly set up the pieces anew, sliding the board around so the white ones were in front of him, while she carefully righted the black ones. She'd won the last game, so he had to go first this time.

“Five royals on the Inquisitor,” Dorian announced to the tavern at large, setting a fresh glass of wine at her elbow. Bull transferred his scowl at her win to his gleefully grinning partner.

“Your betrayal is noted, kadan.”

“Come now, amatus, if you win I'll be joyful for you, if she wins, I'll be richer. It works out either way.”

“I'll take that bet,” Krem called out from the Chargers' corner, to a muddled, half drunken chorus of support from the rest of them on behalf of their chief.

“I didn't realize our chess matches were getting so serious,” she said with a grin.

“They have nothing better to do, it seems,” Bull growled, glaring his eye at them all.

“I'll side with Dorian,” Varric said and Hawke chortled. “Five royals on her Inquisitorialness.”

“Fine,” Hawke said, “I'll side with Bull.”

“It's getting quite competitive,” Carly said to her opponent. Both of them were enjoying this enough that snark was called for. “You sure you're up for it?”

“Are you?” he shot back, teeth gleaming as he grinned. “I'll admit you've gotten better. Spending too much time with that smug little asshole you call a lover.”

“Solas didn't teach me, Bull. My grandmother did. I was just out of practice.” She straightened out her king so it was facing directly at him and gave him an over the top gesture. “Whenever you're ready, my friend.”

He slid his queen side pawn forward two spaces and without missing a beat she moved her king side knight onto the board. He tilted his head at her and sighed. She'd learned early on that he never knew what to make of that opening move, which of course was why she did it. A flurry of plays later, she had her king swapped behind the protective line of pawns and her castle, while Bull had opened up his side of the board and put his queen in play. Neither had taken a piece from the other as of yet, but it was getting close.

“Where is Solas anyway?” Bull asked as he contemplated his turn. He ended up moving a pawn,

having little else to do without relinquishing the stalemate of their current offensives against each other.

“Doing elfy stuff,” she replied, hearing Sera scoff loudly somewhere in the crowd.

“Hmm, he's been gone a long time.”

She moved another piece and sat back to watch him think it over before he made his next move. “Only a week or so. And we see each other in the Fade.”

“Ugh,” Bull shuddered and she grinned at him. “Fade walkers.”

“Oh, c'mon Bull, are you telling me you don't enjoy your dreams?”

“Not when I now know all the dancing girls are actually demons.”

She snorted at him and went back to the game.

They set several traps for each other, and neither fell for them. However, the board had turned into a convoluted mess of half tangled plays and something had to give. Carly took one of Bull's pawns. She was able to follow through the next several moves he could make in her head, and he made the one she most expected, taking her pawn with his queen. But it opened up the board. Another flurry of moves and Carly had her side of the game well protected from Bull's obvious plan of attack, and her bishop holding his king in check. There were groans from Bull's end of the betting pool and smug grins from her own. Neither player paid attention.

He escaped the check with his own bishop, drawing her into a locked battle of shuffling pieces, a pawn here, her bishop there. She moved her knight away from attack by his queen and realized just after she let go that it was probably a mistake.

He pounced on it, taking her knight with a pawn with glee while now holding one of her castles at bay. She took stock of her position and decided to let him take her castle. He would have to sacrifice his queen to do it, and she still had hers. He went for it, and she ignored the cheers from his side of the table as she took the powerful piece with her remaining castle. The cheers abruptly stopped and the whole tavern seemed to hold its collective breath.

From there, it was a chase of attrition. She pursued his king around the board with her queen and final castle, cutting down his remaining pieces until he had a single pawn left. Then she went for the kill, boxing him into a corner and putting him in checkmate.

He growled, but it wasn't at her. When he looked back at her, he seemed oddly proud. Or impressed. “You led me into a very pretty trap with that knight, Carly.”

Money changed hands around them and she basked in her victory, but she wasn't going to lie to him. “I'll be honest with you Bull. I didn't even see it coming. I thought I was done for.”

“Well done, vhenan,” Solas said, stepping into view from wherever he'd been watching the proceedings. She knew her face lit up with a ridiculous smile, and he answered with a small one of his own.

“You're back! Good travels?”

He straddled the bench next to her, his long legs stretched out so he was almost touching her at back and knees. “Yes, I accomplished what I set out to do. Among other things.” He turned to Bull. “Are you finished being beaten, Tal-Vashoth, or shall we try it once again?”

“Oh no, I'm not playing with you anymore, mage. Play with her, if you're in the mood for a thrashing.”

Carly bit her lip and hoped she wasn't blushing. The gleam in Bull's eye told her he knew *exactly* how that had sounded and that it had been very deliberate. Next to her, Solas smiled just a touch slyly, then stood and took her hand. He'd barely sat for more than a minute.

“Perhaps I shall.”

He pulled her up with him and led her out of the Herald's Rest to a chorus of laughter and cheering and she shook her head in bemusement until the dark enveloped them outside. She took a deep breath of the muggy summer air and tipped back her head. It was entirely overcast and the night was dark with it. In fact, between the humidity in the air and the cloud cover, she thought it might rain.

“How long were you there?”

“I arrived when you put him in the first check.”

So all he'd missed the gambling and the banter, although she figured he knew it was there. Her motley crew would gamble on anything if Dorian and Varric were involved. Hence why she stuck to chess and didn't attempt to learn Wicked Grace. Although Varric hadn't stopped trying to persuade her.

They went into the keep and climbed the stairs to their chamber. Carly mused idly at how easily it had become *theirs* rather than *hers*. Solas began undressing and she pulled the spigot on the bathtub so it started filling, grateful again that at least here there was running water. Hell, she was grateful she'd talked Josephine into having this room converted into a bathroom in the first place. It wasn't like she needed a full wine cellar in her chamber. She didn't bother with any temperature settings, and sure enough, he wandered in and sketched a heating glyph under the water himself.

“Magic sure does have its uses. I still think it's funny that you can literally blow hot and cold, though,” she said lightly. He hummed an answer and when the tub was filled, he slid into it with a sigh. Usually she would join him, but he hadn't asked and she'd read his mood as distracted and so didn't presume. “What's on your mind, ma fen?”

He turned his head and looked at her where she stood at the door. He raised his hand to beckon her and she took it, dropping to her knees next to the tub. He lifted it to his lips and pressed a kiss to the back of it, but the smile that accompanied the action didn't quite reach his eyes. “I wonder that you are not less pleased to see me after what you saw in the Fade.”

“Why? I knew what you'd done. I always knew. Seeing it play out didn't change anything.” She leaned her cheek on the rim of the tub and peered at him, trying to gauge where this somber mood was coming from and how deep it went. “If it made you upset to see it again, I'm only sorry I asked.”

“No, do not be sorry. I promised I would not hide anything from you, did I not?” Something subtle relaxed in him, and his mood seemed to brighten. Whether or not it was a cover she couldn't tell, but she hoped it wasn't. “It was not easy to watch or remember, but I am not upset that you saw it.”

“That's good.” She leaned in and he met her halfway to kiss. “I missed you.”

“You saw me every night.”

“Not the same. I'd still wake up without you. Besides, Fade tongue just doesn't really do it for me

anymore.” He tugged on her and she squawked, hanging half over the edge of the tub, splashing them both as she braced her free arm against the far side of it before she fell in completely.

“Solas!”

“If it is real tongue you are looking for, vhenan, I would suggest getting much more naked and much closer.”

“Oh?”

He let go of her hand and started to pull the pins from her hair. “Oh yes.”

Well, when he put it like that...

Chapter End Notes

So fun story time. It had been so long since I actually played that when writing this chapter, I had to set up my board and play against myself to get the details down. And like Carly (or maybe Carly is like me), my paternal grandmother really did teach me, and I took that knowledge and ran with it to a championship title with my high school club. I was one of two female players in the whole city and surrounding suburbs. Yes, I'm still salty/smug about it 25+ years later.

The Art of Stillness**

Chapter Notes

8/11/20

NSFW

She grinned at her ancient elf. And while he finished pulling her hair out of its tidy bun, she began unbuttoning the fitted tunic she wore casually when she was around Skyhold, dropping it unceremoniously on the floor. The rest of her clothes soon followed and she stepped into the still steaming water of the bath, belatedly realizing that he should have let some of it out before she joined him.

“Ma fen, it's going to slosh.”

He cocked his head at her, rolling it across the rim of the tub in a gesture that was at once so familiar and yet so *mundane* she snorted. “Tell it to an elf who cares. Come here.”

She slid under and into his arms and sure enough, the water poured over the edge of the tub in a giant wave to make puddles all over the tiles. She laughed and then gasped as he ran his hands down her back to her butt, holding her tightly to him. Her hair fell around her face in waves, half bedraggled by the water that was entirely too high still.

“My quicksilver wolf,” she said teasingly.

“What do you mean?” He placed a quick kiss on her lips.

“I mean that not even a minute ago you were all morose and mopey. Now look at you.”

He smiled crookedly. “Perchance I missed you as well and the Fade does not do you justice.”

“Sweet talker.”

He lifted her higher in the tub, giving her a chance to settle her legs around him in a straddle. Already he was growing hard under her and she wiggled just a bit to tease. One hand went to the back of her head, taking a fistful of hair and pulling her back gently but inexorably. His mouth closed over her bared breast. She would have squirmed, but he held her too tight. She braced her hands on the rim of the tub and let the sensation pour through her as he suckled and bit at her. All she could do was shiver and let out of a gasping moan. She felt him smile against her skin as his mouth passed over to her other breast, giving it the same attention.

When he released her, she sank against him, the full length of his erection pressed against her center, hotter than the water. She traced the lines of his tattoos idly with water droplets, could feel his eyes on her as she did it. She met them and saw his expression had turned sweet rather than his usual sly and she kissed him, a simple meeting of lips that asked for nothing. “Ar lath ma.”

“Ma vhenan, I do not think there are ages enough to show you how much I love you.”

“That much, huh?”

He pulled her back for a more thorough kiss, his tongue against hers, sliding wet and warm. He tasted of woodsmoke and the spices from road rations and she nearly giggled at the thought – again so mundane – of him impatiently trying to get home so that he didn't even stop for more than a quick bite to eat.

He pressed her spine down, making her tilt her hips so the just the tip of him slid into her. Slowly, degrees of slow her body had every chance to adjust to, he filled her as their mouths met. They both groaned as he pushed up that final inch, their bodies a closed loop of connection. His hands fitted themselves around her hips with bruising strength although he did not thrust or even flex inside her. He stayed still, content it seemed, to just be there. A burning sensation for *more* began to prick at her senses.

“Solas...”

“Yes, vhenan?” he whispered, so falsely innocent she glared at him. His grip on her meant she couldn't move to ride him, but she could clench on him, so she did. He hissed, a low sound that made her feel powerful. “Do that again,” he said, moving to her throat. She did and he bit her neck like he always did. It was her turn to hiss. “Again.”

He didn't often let her have control, and to be fair, he wasn't still, but he did love to let her play with as much rope as he gave her. Again and again she worked her inner muscles on him while he held her still, knowing it was building a tension in both of them that would be explosive once the leash was slipped. But he didn't do it, didn't let her go to rut against him like she wanted to, didn't pound into her like he enjoyed. The water stilled around them, still hot and steamy from his glyph, and she concentrated on the pinpoint spark of their joined bodies. It was so nearly perfect if he'd just...

He shifted in the water, his pelvic bone sliding under her in a way that set off a cataclysm of response as he brushed against her clit. She hadn't realized just how denial of movement would build the need for it until even the slightest difference could elicit so much. She had a sneaking suspicion that *he* knew, and was doing it deliberately.

“I am,” he agreed with her thought, dipping as always. “If this was Arlathan, I would keep you here for hours, days even, hovering on the edge of what you crave, never giving it, never feeding it until you were blind from the need.”

The noise that left her throat was animal and he smiled. “You are so dead, ma fen.”

“Not before you.” His voice was the low purr that almost *always* made her want to just drool and collapse into a puddle. She wondered if he knew that. If he was now doing it on purpose, deliberately heightening her awareness of him. And her reaction *to* him. With his ability to get into her head, she had to assume so, and she grinned fiercely at him.

She redoubled her efforts, tightening and clenching on him, hoping to disrupt his patience enough to move within her. But he didn't. His hands stayed steady on her hips, his eyes blazed with heat and adoration when she met them, the crafty expression she loved so well warming the air as the bath warmed her body. She couldn't believe just how close she was to climax and writhed her upper body just to get any sensation that wasn't this. He chuckled at her frustration and flexed in her a single time.

She gasped as her entire body shuddered around his cock, rippling the water and almost, *almost* tipping her over the edge. She'd managed to slide him out just a bit, an inch, no more. He hummed. “I shall have to start over now.”

“Oh, God, please no...just finish me.”

He seated himself back into her fully and held her still. “No.”

It built all over again, a slow climb to a peak he wouldn't let her fall from and she whined, pleaded and promised him anything if he would *just move*. He laughed gently, his body rumbling with it, the vibration setting off tiny explosions wherever their skin touched. Her clench now was involuntary. He was watching her closely, his eyes following every twitch and change of expression, no matter how small. She couldn't bear to keep his gaze then, her mind unraveling even as her body tightened like a spring. It was overwhelming how strongly she craved any movement, any momentum to reach her climax.

Her breath was gasping as if she'd been running and she felt prickles of sweat on the skin that wasn't under the water. Conversely, it made her shiver and the noise he made was something to behold. Her body tightened on his in response and for a moment, the briefest headiest moment, he flexed again inside her, almost enough to make her come. But not quite.

“Solas, for the love of all the gods...”

“Yes, vhenan?” he asked guilelessly when she faltered.

“Just fuck me already!”

“Are you yet ready to die, to burn?” he murmured, his mouth against her skin again, slow sweeping licks up her neck and down her collarbones, his teeth sharp on her at the finish of each touch. She jolted as much as she was able and sparks went off inside her belly, a heat igniting that she couldn't escape. She couldn't even reply to his soft question. She tightened on him as hard as she could, feeling so full and yet so empty. He made a soft appreciative noise and she gathered the tattered ends of her strength to do it again.

And he flexed within her a final time.

Her orgasm was instantaneous and shattering, racing down her spine and limbs, making her quake and shout as her body imploded on him, a never ending feedback loop. Blinding, just as he said it would be. Her throat was hoarse before she came down from the high of it. And he finally let go of her hips, only to brace her body against him as he stood up, so nearly effortless it was infuriating, and got out of the tub.

He laid her on the floor of the bathroom, stuffing the discarded tunic under her head. She was still such a whirlwind of aftershocks she barely paid attention and was not prepared for his mouth against her center, hot and hungry. He lapped at her, licking up her slick and driving her over the edge again as now sensation had sustenance from motion. She came again against his mouth, her legs curled over his back, so quick it was nearly painful. He didn't even wait for her to come down this time, but plunged into her, his full length filling her before she could move her legs enough to give him room. They slid across the soaked floor as he stroked himself in her, holding her leg on his shoulder with one hand and bracing himself with the other.

With a shout of his own he came, pulsing in her just as hard as she had spasmed around him before. He collapsed against her, slipping from her body with a wet sound that was nearly lost in their mingled gasping breaths. Before she could even begin to feel the discomfort from laying on the tile floor, he rolled them over, letting her drape across him, boneless and replete.

“I'm glad you're home,” she managed. His body rumbled under hers as he laughed.

“As am I.”

Naked Joy

Chapter Notes

8/14/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The low rumble of approaching thunder woke Carly. The chamber was gloomy and dark and she snuggled closer to Solas, still deeply asleep and off on the wanderings she'd just left. They had been exploring the more recent history of Skyhold once they'd managed to make it to the bed. The Fereldans, the bandit queen, the priests who studied Solas's work without knowing what they were looking at. But the rumbles drew her away.

A brief flash and long delayed rolling boom told her the storm was still a ways off, but she slid out of the bed to stand at the balcony doors, open to the breeze, cool on her bare skin. The air was heavy and waiting in the early morning grayness and she breathed deep of the ozone smell that floated just on the edges of it. It hadn't even started raining again, although the dampness on the balcony told her it had during the night.

She looked over her shoulder to watch Solas sleep and smiled. The roof could have come down on them last night and neither would have noticed. The peace that settled in her breast swelled and filled her with such a light feeling that she felt like she could fly. *This* was their fairy tale ending, enduring happiness. Together.

All at once she remembered Mythal's words, and the fact that she'd met the goddess at all. She hadn't had a chance to tell him yet. She turned back to the balcony and leaned on the railing of it, watching the clouds gather as the sky lightened by degrees. No sun, of course, but a layer of gray lifted just the same. There was another flash and a deep following growl of thunder reverberated through the mountains. She turned her head up to the sky and smelled the coming rain.

"Now there is a sight to wake up to," Solas said from the doorway. She jumped and whirled around to him, seeing him wrapped haphazardly in his wolf pelt. She gave him a welcoming smile as the sky grumbled. "You left the Fade for this?"

"Morning, ma fen. And of course I did. Real thunderstorm trumps the Fade any day. Tel'abelas."

He joined her on the balcony, standing behind her to wrap a portion of the pelt over her too. He snickered. "I suppose that is fair enough."

"Are you cold?"

"Aren't you?"

"In this weather? Never." She still snuggled up to him and sure enough, his skin was chilled against hers. "Or do elves just have weirdness about standing around naked. Wouldn't have pegged you for prudity."

"Hardly," he agreed, his voice in her ear as he tucked himself close around her. For a moment a flash of game memory went through her, seeing the Inquisitor alone on the balcony. No such

loneliness for her. A stir of interest prodded her backside and she giggled.

“Before you distract me utterly, there's some things we need to talk about,” she said. He hummed and his fingers crept along her ribs, regardless of her words. “Focus, ma fen. I met Mythal.”

His hands stopped their wandering for a moment, tightening on her skin as if he wanted to make a fist but she was there, then smoothly slid across her again. “I know.”

“What do you mean, 'you know'? You were in Halamshiral.”

“I saw her in the Fade.”

She snorted. Of course. Still... “Solas, she had some interesting things to say. Worrying things. About the future, that is.”

He stopped trying to distract her and sighed. “Yes, she did. Things I had already considered.”

Carly turned in his arms, needing to see his face. “You had?”

“Do you remember, dancing at the Winter Palace, and I told you I was ready to listen?”

“Of course.”

“I had considered then what rewriting time would mean. I knew then that if I was to go through with my plans, we would never meet.” He touched a finger to her lips so she didn't interrupt. “I told myself it should not matter, that I had no reason to think I would live. What was you said I would tell you? That I walked the Din'anshiral. Do you know what that means?”

“Yes, I do. It is the road of death, or at least, a journey from which there is a small to zero expectation of survival.”

He smiled, a little sadly. “Yes. I told myself that it did not change things, that I would be dead or near enough to it that the memory of you would only be sweet and not bitter. But for you...”

“For me?” she prompted when he fell silent.

“There is no way to predict how much you have changed, nor a way to know how much you would remember or be aware of if you were suddenly back in your world. I did not want you to see me become all that you despised, but I could not take everything you have fought for from you either.”

“Solas, if we'd never met, I'd still be in my world, a happy little beta tech researcher. I wouldn't have known anything different.”

“It is not a risk I deemed worthy of taking.”

She looked up him, so serious and studious, his face the smooth mask that he hadn't worn before her in months. “Solas, are you telling me that for once in your interminably long life, you made a *selfish* decision? And now you're standing there looking at me like you expect me to be upset about it?”

The mask cracked and a glimmer of hope lit in his eyes. “I have tried, so very hard, to keep to my purpose. To fulfill the promise I made to restore the elven people. But I find it has no meaning if you are not there to share it. You are important to me, more important than I could ever have imagined. I never expected to meet someone who could turn my attention from the Fade. But you do more than that, you walk it by my side, and happily. I would not lose that.” He cradled her face

in his hands and the wolf pelt fell off both of them. “Ar lath ma, vhenan. Those words were never truer than they are now.”

She leaned into his touch and kissed him, her arms winding their way around his back, solid under her hands. They were so lost in the kiss that neither of them heard the thunder roll much closer than before. They didn't part until the first fat, cold raindrops hit their bare skin. Solas turned his head to it then, not in any irritation but in joy, and let the rain beat on him. After her initial yelp of surprise, Carly just looked at him, at his reveling in the simple fact of being alive. The downpour had no power to chill or dampen her mood. She'd happily stand in the rain for a hundred years to see that look on his face.

“Screw whatever plans there were to be had today,” she said, laying a kiss between the tattoos on his chest. “Take me back to bed, ma fen.”

He laughed, free and loud over the thunder. “Ma nuvenin.”

Hunger was the only thing that could possibly drive her out of the chamber and she was sour about it. That and having to get dressed in order to sate said hunger. An unabashed, ancient Elvhen god in her bed took a pretty serious precedence over any sense of duty. But her stomach didn't care about that, and she reluctantly put on leggings and one of his threadbare shirts to go down to the kitchens to pilfer something before anyone saw her.

The rain hadn't stopped and it looked to remain steady the rest of the day. The castle was quiet as she poked through the pantries for something to feed two hungry people who had no desire to see anyone else today. The kitchen staff tittered and she shared a conspiratorial look with them, which made them relent and help her put together a full basket of food to take back with her.

“Ma dar'lasa nehn,” the older elven cook said softly. “Britha Fen'Harel dar atish'an. It is good.”

“Ma serannas, Misyl,” she whispered, only roughly translating the woman's words. She was a bit surprised someone would so openly say his name here, but then realized there was only one way the woman would know it. *One of his agents, who is apparently happy for us*. “I mean to keep it that way.”

Before they could continue their hunt and half broken conversation, a horn blew outside. Misyl startled, nearly dropping the basket of food before Carly had a good hold on it. She and the others made their way outside, peering through the rain as Solas came dashing through the Great Hall from their chamber, still pulling his sweater over his head, his feet as bare as hers. His face was shocked, rapidly disappearing behind his usual mask of placidity.

“What is it?” she asked him as he came to a stop at her side.

“Elvhen.” Without saying anything to him, she pressed the basket into his hands and walked out into the downpour, ignoring how it plastered her hair to her head.

“Open the portcullis!” she shouted up to guards in their watchtowers.

A contingent of Elvhen stood lined up in formation on the long bridge leading out from Skyhold, a familiar face at the head. He stepped across the threshold of the gate and nodded a greeting to her.

“Be welcome to Skyhold, Abelas,” she said, barely able to keep from grinning fatuously at him. He returned her gaze and his own softened, perhaps realizing in that moment that she had truly meant it.

“Ma nuvenin,” he replied after a moment and she flushed remembering the last person who said that her, who was now striding across the courtyard as the rest of the elves filled it. They spoke too quickly for Carly to keep up, but it seemed Solas was offering the same welcome. Abelas turned back to her when they were done and nodded again, with more deference in his posture. “For now we will stay.”

“I'm glad. Where...?”

“We will find places,” he said. He stalked off with his troop of Sentinels and Carly found Solas's eyes on her.

“What?”

The corner of his mouth curled in a very small smile, one that nevertheless imparted such incredible pride in her she nearly burst from it. “You did invite them, did you not?”

“I did,” she agreed.

“I don't think you know what this means, for the guardians of Vir'Abelasan to enter a shemlen stronghold and put themselves under the leadership of – to them anyway – a Dalish hunter.”

“Well, when you put it like that I do. Wow.” She fidgeted and his smile grew larger. “Guess I should put some real clothes on, huh.”

“That would be advisable, vhenan. Since that shirt is soaked and you are naked under it.”

“Shit, c'mon, no free peep show for the troops.” His laughter followed her back into the keep where she raced up the stairs to their chamber before anyone could see the furious blush on her cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

Misyl – Blade of the Wind, she was born Dalish but left her clan before taking vallaslin. She's been an agent of Solas most of her life, spying on the doings of human nobles from within the kitchen. (She adores Carly.) Keep her in mind, she'll return for another appearance at least once later on. Why yes, I have a whole backstory already thought out for this original NPC.

Tel'abelas - I'm not sorry

Ma dar'lasa nehn – literally: you hold/are given joy, or you look happy

Britha Fen'Harel dar atish'an. - It appears the Dread Wolf is at a place of peace

Thanks, as always, to FenxShiral for Project Elvhen

A Moment of Reflection

Chapter Notes

8/18/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It rained for several days straight. When the weather finally cleared the absence of the pitter patter that had been so constant woke Carly from her sleep. She left Solas blissfully in the Fade and dressed simply to walk in the garden. It was still foggy and cool as she meandered, but it was nice. Quiet. She saw the hooded figure seated on the ground only just before she tripped over him. He looked up, pale gold eyes that saw so much. The green of Mythal's vallaslin was still shocking to her against his sallow skin.

“Sorry, hahren, I didn't mean to disturb you.”

Abelas nearly smiled...nearly. “You did not, Da'Fen.”

Little Wolf, he called her, as he gestured for her to join him on the ground. It made her breath catch and she sank into the wet grass across from him, drawing her knees to her chest and hugging them for the lack of anything better to do with her hands. “Why do you call me that?”

This time the faint smile was nearly a smirk. Did all Elvhen make that face? “You walk at his side, although you are not his equal. You wear his markings, and he has not forbidden it. I have spoken with many since our arrival, and they all tell me the same. He heeds your counsel. He was reckless and unthinking when he was young. For all the wisdom he gave it was often rash. He has more care now, with both his words and his deeds.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“I believe it is good, Da'Fen. I have seen the tides and flow of time, each waking more foreign than the last. We have walked very different roads, our journeys bear no resemblance other than our loyalty to Mythal. And we both struggle to find worth in this era where the People are so diminished. I have learned why the Veil was dropped between the waking world and the Fade. And yet...it *must* fall. The world was not meant to be sundered. He has need of your balance and restraint if the natural order is not to be disrupted to the point of destruction. Again.”

“You know the Veil is failing?” she asked.

Abelas took his time answering and when he did, he seemed troubled. “It is strong here, I feel it press, smothering my magic. In other places I walked upon leaving the Temple, I found it weaker. It is tearing like rotted cloth, no matter how you work to restore it. Sooner or later it will fall. It is inevitable.” He gestured at the Anchor. “You have no magic. How did you come to carry his?”

“An accident.” She wondered how she could explain it when it had happened before her arrival in Thedas. She had no idea how close to the game the real life events had been. “Corypheus located his orb and tried to unlock it using some kind of darkspawn ritual. He literally lost hold of it and I happened to be in the right place at the right time. I caught it. I absorbed the key, the Anchor. I lost the orb in the aftermath, though. This whole fight has been about trying to get it back, while

Corypheus has been hunting me to get the Anchor back, and failing that, he's trying to open the orb another way. Now only Solas can take the Anchor from me.”

“You mean Fen'Harel.”

“I can't call him that in everyday conversation, he's keeping that part of himself hidden,” she reminded Abelas. “And the title has taken on too many negative connotations for him to be comfortable with it now.”

She looked at this elf who was in many ways a reflection of the world Solas wanted to restore. He returned her gaze steadily, the same ineffable calm that Solas had about him so often equally as present. He seemed remarkably well adjusted to the idea that one of his gods was working behind the scenes of the Inquisition. Then again, knowing Solas was Fen'Harel meant he also knew the Evanuris were not truly deities.

“Did you know him, hahren? Before the Veil, I mean.”

“I would not say so. Fen'Ghilen stood at the side of Mythal, and did not often travel among us, the common folk of the People. Not for uncounted years.”

“Not until she was killed and he became known more as Fen'Harel.”

Abelas inclined his head in assent.

“How long was his rebellion?”

“You do not know?”

She shook her head. “One of many things lost after the fall of Arlathan.”

“It is hard to remember. I do not think it was long in terms of how I would look at it.”

“Because you're immortal,” she said, not really making it a question. He gave her a slight nod. “But probably longer than the average lifetime of the Dalish now.”

“Perhaps. I do not measure by the finite moons you count.”

“Rash and reckless,” she whispered to herself. “It's hard to think of him that way, you know? He's so...composed now.”

Abelas laughed. “He is still much like he was then. Quick to judge, quick to act. Slow to you, perhaps, but...”

“Not to you.” She shook her head at the thought of it. Solas had been planning this final act for a long time, but had only been awake in the world for about two years now. To Abelas, it must seem the blink of an eye. She thought she understood, at least conceptually. “The world moves at a much faster pace for mortals. And he moves faster in it.”

“Yes. In my many years of guardianship of my Lady's Temple, I awoke rarely, but often enough to see how low the People had fallen. The Dalish are all that remain, and the years unspool like thread dropped from a height. You have lost much, and cling to much that is untrue.”

“*They* do. I'm not really Dalish, hahren, I just look like one. Part of why I can temper Solas so well, I guess. I'm not of this world at all. I have a much better grasp on what's been lost than most.” She sighed. “I just want to help him do it right.”

“You do, Da’Fen. Do not doubt that.”

“Have you decided what you and your Sentinels will do?” It didn’t escape her that he asked for no details.

“We are under your command, Da’Fen.”

She shook her head, that wasn’t what she really meant. “You don’t have to be, you know.”

“Your cause is worthy, and you will have need of us, I think, to defeat this Corypheus. ”

“I appreciate that. But I was thinking more of will you stay...after?”

“I am not certain. We are not accustomed to choosing our own fates. Fen’Harel does not like to be reminded of how many he failed to free.” She glanced at his vallaslin and he nodded gently, seeing her eyes shift to the branching pattern that denoted he was property.

“He could yet free you, and that’s not all you can remind him of.”

“That is true. I shall think on it.”

She stood, feeling the damp work its way through her clothes. She didn’t know how he could stand to sit like that in it. “I’ll let you return to your...meditations.”

“We will be ready when you need us.”

“Ma serannas, Abelas. Truly.”

He gave her one last smile, genuine and warm. “Da’banal.”

It was still too early for the castle to really be up and about and she went back up to their chamber. Solas wasn’t in the bed anymore, but the balcony doors were open and she found him there, watching the sky blush with morning.

“You are up very early, vhenan,” he said when she joined him.

“Wanted to enjoy a walk without the rain. Nearly tripped over Abelas in the garden.”

“Hmm.”

“Solas? Are you upset that I invited the Elvhen here?”

“No. But I do not know if they will fit in well with the Inquisition.”

“That’s not the only reason I want them here.” He turned to her then, his face questioning. “They needed a safer home. This is what we’ve got right now.”

“There are other places they can go.”

“Yeah, there are, but it wasn’t my place to invite them into your stronghold without discussing it with you first.”

“Thank you,” he said, surprised. There were times she still got exasperated by his obtuseness.

“Ma fen, did you really think I would do that? You’re no servant to anyone, least of all me.” His

eyes lit up and she caught her breath. There was something in that look that made her tingle in the best way. “Don't change the subject,” she scolded.

He hummed noncommittally, but he was still smiling. She shook her head. Who would have thought under that calm exterior that he held such a deep running lust for...well, lust? *Always the quiet ones*, she thought.

He laughed outright at that, dipping as usual. His arms stole around her and drew her close and he bent her backwards as he kissed her. She pushed away any lingering memories of other balcony kissing scenes and got lost in the heat of his mouth, the grip his hands had on her, supporting her. When he finally let her go, she was gasping.

“I do love the way you wreck me, ma fen,” she said, tucking her head under his chin.

“Then I would be a fool to stop doing it.”

She was about to reply when a buzzing pain started in the Anchor, rapidly growing until she was wincing. Before she could do more than raise her eyes to his, the Anchor sparked in her hand, the agony ripping into her until she doubled over. It was as bad as when she used Mark of the Rift and with no time to prepare for it, it punched like she'd been stabbed.

“Carly!” Solas exclaimed, catching her in his arms before she fell to her knees on the stone of the balcony. “What is it?”

She turned and scanned the sky, trying to ignore the sparks flying from her hand. Surely they would see it from here, they weren't that far from the ruins of Haven and the Temple of Sacred Ashes. There was a flash of green and the sky erupted. It took a long time for the boom to reach them, but she was ready for it now. A rush of gusting wind rattled her and buffeted Solas as he held her.

“It's go time,” she whispered.

Chapter End Notes

Dun Dun DUNNNN....

Before anyone worries, we are not anywhere close to the end of the fic. Just the end of the main storyline. We've got DLC's to cover and then the actual ending (that I'm still working on writing).

Feedback is, as ever, the lifeblood. Let me know what you think!

Oft Hidden Secrets

Chapter Notes

8/21/20

“Ma fen,” she said, trying to find some calm as the entire castle turned itself upside down with preparations and provisioning before they marched on the Temple of Sacred Ashes. “It’s time to tell them.”

Solas looked at her across their chamber as he packed whatever supplies he thought he would need. “You think it wise?”

“I think continuing to hide this very important bit of information will hinder more than help. We have a difficult battle ahead of us, and there will likely be times you’ll wish you weren’t hiding behind the facade of a mortal apostate. Better to bring that to an end now. I know what I’m up against here, but let’s be real, I have no idea how badly this will go in real life. I will *need* my immortal mage god at my side.” She gave him a crooked smile, hoping it came off more reassured than worried. “You would have left today. In the game.”

He crossed the chamber to her and drew her close. “You are still concerned that I will, aren’t you?”

“Maybe a tiny bit. I’m sorry, it’s just...I’ve done this too many times. I half expect to hear you say that what we had was real, but it wasn’t supposed to be like this and then walk away. I know that this is all diff...”

“Hush now,” he interrupted, placing his finger over her lips. “I will not leave today. Or tomorrow. Or any day after that. What we have *is* real. I will not forsake it.” He took the jawbone he always wore and slipped it over his head. Carly stood stupefied as he put it on her. “There is little protection in the rune itself, but perhaps this will restore some confidence that I will not leave, since I will want it back.”

“There’s a rune on this?” she asked, turning the jawbone over and seeing that, sure enough, a tiny character was etched into it. She didn’t know them well enough to know what it said, but she could take a guess. *Protection, concealment*. He’d always worn it in his guise as a humble wanderer. She wondered if that meant most people didn’t see the things she did in him.

“You are right,” he said, picking up her thoughts. “It is concealment. A glamour, if you will. It’s never worked on you because you already knew who I was. If you are going to tell them, I will no longer need it.”

“Then you’re okay with this?”

“You *are* correct in saying there will be times I am likely to draw on more power than I should have as a simple mage.”

“Well, we don’t have to tell them *everything*. Just that you’re not...well, ya know, not a mortal apostate.” She gave him a searching look. “And only if you’re absolutely sure with this.”

“I am sure.” He kissed her forehead. “And we should not dally any longer.”

“No, you're right.” But she snuggled into him first. There was no telling how this would end. He held her tight, seeming to know just how much she needed it.

She stared at the map on the table in the War Room. Cullen and Cassandra were arguing over troop placement, while Josephine stood at Carly's side, her writing pad in hand. The rest of Carly's tight knit companions, as well as Abelas, were arranged around the room, waiting for their assignments. “Enough,” Carly snapped. “All of you.”

They fell silent and turned to her. She grabbed hold of the jawbone, wondering if that was why she'd been talked over so much in this meeting. She sighed, it wasn't important now that she had their attention. No matter how this went down, lives were going to be lost. It was the cost of war. But this was what they'd been working towards since the beginning. She knew she wasn't asking for needless sacrifice.

“Okay, the Sentinels will stay in the rear, covering the mages that are going. Abelas, you will be in charge of your archers. Dorian, you're in charge of the mages.” She gave Cass a glare before the Seeker could object. Dorian made a sound of assent. “Cullen, you'll take the Fereldan mercs and half the Inquisition forces on the left flank. Cassandra, you will head the right flank with the rest. Bull and the Chargers will be your back up.”

“Very good,” Cassandra said crisply, at least mollified that she'd still be in a good position. Bull made a happy noise.

“And the rest?” Leliana asked. Carly turned to her.

“That's your department. Rogues, thieves and assorted mercs. Use them as infiltrators and for guerrilla attacks. Keep the enemy guessing, never knowing where the next assault will come from. Cole, Sera, go with her.”

“Aw, yes, this'll be the tits!” the elf crowed. Carly couldn't help it, she grinned. Cole said nothing, but then again, she hadn't expected him to.

“Thom, stick with the Chargers on the Seeker's side.”

“As you say, Inquisitor.”

“Varric, you'll be with the Sentinels and mages. Try to leave some shit for those elves to shoot, all right?”

“And Hawke?” he asked, his face too strained to call his expression a smile.

“Also with Leliana's rogues. Can't be helped,” she added, seeing the distressed look that passed between the couple. She turned her gaze to the one person she hadn't assigned yet. “Vivienne, you'll stay here with the non-combatant mages. Hold the fort, prep the infirmary for casualties.”

“If you wish, Inquisitor.”

“Who will you take against Corypheus?” Cullen asked.

“Morrigan. And Solas.”

“Is that wise, Inquisitor?” Cassandra asked. “Just two mages against such a foe...”

“Morrigan has a trick up her sleeve, and I need Solas with me.” She locked eyes with her lover. He nodded. “The orb is his.”

The War Room erupted then in various shouts and exclamations. Cassandra, Cullen and Carly just looked at each other and she wondered which one would break first, or if the room would settle down before they could. Cass was starting to look angry, putting the pieces into place of all the things that had happened since the first Breach. All right, Seeker first.

Cassandra whirled on Solas, her face growing red. “You *used* us, all along!”

“The Inquisition was in the best position to regain my orb,” he said calmly, not bothering to deny it but putting a better spin on it. “It was to all our benefits to work together.”

“You knew!” Cass now swung on Carly. “You knew from the beginning. You had just met him, *how* did you know?”

“Because I’m not the Herald of Andraste, Cassandra. I’m from another world. I’ve had foreknowledge of everything that was going to happen.”

“Well that explains many things,” Josephine muttered.

“How many of you knew?” Cass turned to the gathered companions, half of whom wouldn’t meet her eyes.

“Well, I had no idea,” Sera said, then giggled. “That’s awesome, innit. What a trick!”

Carly straightened up from the table and pinned Cass with a steady gaze. “Varric, Cole, Solas obviously, Dorian and I’m assuming Bull.”

“Yeah, I knew, Boss.” She gave him a half smile.

“Leliana’s had her suspicions, no doubt.” The Nightingale nodded, gracefully accepting that neither of them had hidden much from each other. “I told Abelas just this morning. And Morrigan when I assisted her with Kieran’s disappearance.”

“Why hide it from the rest of us?”

“C’mon, Seeker, you would have thrown her right back into a jail cell,” Varric said. “Or just burned her at the stake out of hand.”

“We’ll have plenty of time afterwards for any questions you might have, Cassandra,” Carly said, jabbing at Varric to keep his less than helpful comments to himself. “Right now we have a hard march ahead of us and a tough fight to get through.”

“You already know how it ends, don’t you?” Cullen asked, very softly.

“I have knowledge of how it ends on my side of reality. There’s no telling what it will be like here.”

“Do we win?” the Commander stressed.

This much she hoped she could have confidence in. “Yes, we do. We don’t have another choice.” She looked around the War Room, at all the faces that had become so dear and well known. It was strange how at home she was with them now. And yet, not strange at all. “Corypheus isn’t expecting an army. In my world, the Inquisition forces would still have been returning from the Arbor Wilds. *We* will have the element of surprise for a change. This is what we’ve been fighting

towards for the better part of a year. Now, we all have our positions in order. Let's pack up and get this over with."

They filed out, each of them to prepare as best they could. Cullen walked out with Leliana, leaving Cassandra, Josephine and Carly alone in the room. Even Solas left with Abelas, the spate of Elvish between them too quick and quiet for her to follow. "You want to know why I didn't say anything, don't you?"

"I do, yes."

"Would you even have believed me at the beginning?" She kept her voice calm, knowing how easily Cass could get carried away.

The Seeker was lost in thought for a moment. "No. Perhaps not. It explains much."

"Yeah, like how confused I was when I woke, right?"

"Yes."

"I'd literally woken up in that cell with no idea how I got there."

"But you played along."

"Yeah, because I recognized all of this. I knew what needed to be done. I just hadn't expected to have my actual life depend on it."

"You don't know how you got here?" Josephine asked.

"Nope. Woke up in manacles, the Anchor in my hand. For me, in my world," she huffed. "My *old* world, this is a game. It's not real. I'd played it before. I knew from the start how things would go, who all of you are, who Solas is."

"And who is Solas? Other than a liar."

"Trickster, maybe. But no liar, Cassandra. What he is is an extremely powerful mage, Elvhen and immortal. You wouldn't have believed him either, because all you know about the history of Thedas is what you learned from the Chant of Light. And that was a bastardized version of events after the fall of Arlathan. The Dalish don't even have an accurate accounting of their own history thanks to the fall of their nation and Tevinter's conquest. And then you lot went and treated them all like garbage for the next several centuries. Even if they *had* known, they had no reason to stick their necks out for you."

"Immortal...?" Cass breathed, putting more things together even as she trailed off. Josephine, in the meantime, seemed to have already come to the right conclusion and had delicately snorted into her sleeve. There was only one immortal elven trickster, after all. Carly grinned at her.

"Always have to watch out for the quiet ones."

"Indeed, Lady Lavellan."

"If that is even your name," Cassandra interjected, all hot and bothered again.

"It isn't, but it suited everyone's purposes at the time. Do you have any complaint on how I've run this Inquisition, Seeker?" She needed to nip this before it could affect the outcome of the day and she stared hard at her.

“No, I do not,” Cass said after a long pause. “You have worked hard to build this Inquisition to its position, and you have fought tirelessly on behalf of the people here. I have no complaints.”

“All right, then. Let's finish this.”

“And then we will have a long discussion on the merits of honesty.”

“Maybe. We have to live through the day first.”

How Far Do We Go?

Chapter Notes

8/25/20

screams in climactic fight scene

Oh, and content warning for some gore. They fight a dragon, after all.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They rode into Haven – what remained of it – now overrun with Venatori and Red Templars, the odd demon here and there. Carly directed the Inquisition's forces to take them out as planned and continued on with Morrigan and Solas to the Temple of Sacred Ashes. They arrived at the shattered Temple to see Corypheus attempting to bend the will of her forward scouts. When they refused, the wave of energy that came off him blew them all off their feet, flinging them like so many sticks through the air. She heard Harding cry out.

“Shit!” Carly snarled. Next to her, Solas's eyes gleamed and each scout landed much more softly than she knew they should. “Thanks.”

He didn't reply, but let her take the lead on foot from there. Corypheus spotted her, his mangled face twisting with malice. The pair of demons he summoned fell quickly to Solas and Morrigan and Carly walked between them as if she had no fear of being touched. Corypheus almost seemed pleased now.

“I knew you would come.”

She spared a glance at Morrigan. “Get ready, his dragon will be here any moment.” The Witch nodded and disappeared off her left as she stalked towards the towering darkspawn. “Let's get this done, Vint. It ends here.”

“And so it shall.”

There was a clatter behind them as a mix of forces fought their way into the Temple's ruins. For a second, Corypheus's face contorted anew; all his plans had been thwarted. He threw out his arms just as Bull and Cassandra reached her side and she knew what was coming. The ground rumbled under their feet as Corypheus lifted the whole of the area off the ground. She steadied herself as the ruins rose into the air. The soldiers were cut off from them now, and only Bull and Cass had been close enough not to fall off the edge as the Temple climbed higher. Carly readied her bow.

“You got here fast,” she said to her pair of warriors in an aside.

“Hunting party peeled off from the rest to track you,” Bull said, turning his eye on her. “Krem's got command. We decided not to let them catch you.”

“Just had to have some glory of your own, huh?” she teased. Bull chuckled but Cass was still fuming with battle rage. “I'm glad you're here. Having a couple of tanks on my side won't be a bad thing.”

Before either of them could ask her to clarify what a 'tank' was, Corypheus stepped into sight again, his twisted features taking them all in with a mix of resignation and hatred.

"You have been most successful in foiling my plans," he said as the Temple slowed, becoming more stable. They were still rising, and she was sure this was an attempt to just take the whole mess into the Breach above, but the pace had leveled off. One way or another, this would end. She focused back on his words. "But let us not forget what you are, a thief in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"I could say the same for you," she said. "No monologues, Corypheus. Time to die."

She got off the single shot she'd prepared, which he deflected idly like swatting a fly. A deep growl sounded behind him and the dragon came into view.

"Oh, Boss, you shouldn't have," Bull cried gleefully.

"I aim to please. But give it a minute, we still have a trick to play." She kept her eyes on Corypheus as the dragon stepped over the broken walls of the Temple. She knew Morrigan would be coming through just...about...

A screech split the air and the brightly colored shape of Morrigan in dragon form appeared, sweeping the Blighted thrall of Corypheus off the platform of the floating ruins. Carly cocked her head at the Magister and gave him a cheeky grin, then pulled another arrow. She had no time to watch the aerial battle as she lay shots into Corypheus. Bull, Cassandra and Solas attacked at once and he was unable to rebuff them all, taking Bull's warhammer right in the chest as Solas poured electricity through the arc of it. Cass dealt with the minor wraiths that sprung up as Corypheus attempted to call reinforcements through the Fade. For a moment it seemed her nullification was going to overcome Solas's ability to work his magic, but he pulled more of the Fade around him, unleashing a bevy of attacks, both shocking and cold. Carly took shots when she could, aiming high above the heads of her friends.

She didn't know how long they fought him, and honestly she felt fairly useless hanging back from the fight, but she knew her real strength was going to lie in closing the Breach. It didn't matter how much she fought him now. They just needed to weaken him enough so that she could get the orb away from him.

A shriek came from above and she barely had time to shout out a warning as the locked dragons fell from the sky, slamming into what was once a pleasant courtyard. The red lyrium dragon limped backwards, screaming at them and she saw Morrigan turn back into herself, bleeding heavily. The Witch lifted onto her elbow but couldn't get up and fell unconscious before she could try harder. Carly ran to her side and hauled her away, tucking her in a relatively safe spot.

"Okay, Bull. Have at it," she called as she tried to get a potion down Morrigan's throat. She heard his roar and smiled to herself. It wouldn't be long now.

Solas knelt down beside her, healing magic lighting up his hands. "She's stable enough, vhenan."

"All right. Let's do this."

They ran together to where Corypheus had retreated, using the walls and columns as cover as he shot bloody red tendrils of spells at them. Well, she used the cover, Solas merely deflected them to the Magister's dismay if his desperate taunting said anything. As if he could truly scare them with words. Little by little they whittled him down, stealing shots and flinging magic at him in turn. Cassandra joined them, swinging her greatsword in cleaving swipes, drawing whatever passed for

blood in the abomination they fought.

Carly peeled off from the melee, letting them handle it to see how Bull was doing. The dragon was lamed, wings shredded, and it was bleeding black ichor all over the stones. She reached for her quiver and discovered it was empty. Right, well, this was why she'd been training with Krem. She drew a pair of long daggers and attacked. Behind her, she heard Corypheus cry out and there was a thud as he hit the ground. She knew he wasn't dead yet, but he was well on his way. Good, that meant Solas and Cass would be here to finish off the dragon with her and Bull.

She sliced at the beast, her meager strength barely a match for the armored hide and the dragon swatted at her. As she flew through the air, she got a good look at the abrupt wrath on Solas's face. The breath was knocked out of her as she slammed against a crumbling wall and she slid to the ground in a heap, the stones falling apart around her, half burying her. There was an inhuman snarl and she managed to unearth her head just as Solas morphed from man to wolf.

Cassandra and Bull both shouted in horror and backed away, apparently more disturbed by the sight of a companion shapeshifting beside them than they were of a dragon. That was fine, she knew he didn't need any help anyhow. She watched from her prone position as he launched himself at the throat of the creature, eyes red, the other four opening as he fully realized into his demon shape. He grew larger, twice the size of a normal wolf as he leaped. His teeth sank into the neck of the dragon, curtaining the air in a spurt of ichor and the noise the beast made rattled. He held on, tightening his jaws on it as it flailed, trying to throw him off.

With a final terrific snap, Solas's jaws met through the hide of the dragon, ripping through the throat. The dragon could no longer cry out and it gurgled as it fell to the ground, dead at last. A red ball of energy – the lifeforce Corypheus had imbued into it – fled the body just as Solas raced to her, digging so frantically at the stones burying her that he hadn't even shifted again.

When her legs were free, she levered herself up and cupped her hand around his low slung jaw, dripping still with dragon blood. “Oh, ma fen. You didn't have to go quite *that* far.”

He shifted under her fingers, a singularly odd experience. One second there was fur on a huge hulking beast, the next, skin, too warm and wet with blood. He turned his head and spat several times, clearing his mouth of the tainted ichor and gore. He was a mess. “You were hurt. I did not think.”

“I see that,” she said with a grin. “Thought you couldn't do that outside the Fade. Adrenaline sure is a hell of a drug. Now, I'm not going to kiss you, because you're covered in gross. Help me up.”

He stood and gave her a hand up to her feet. She picked her way carefully around the rubble and debris, knowing what she'd find when she got to Corypheus. He held the orb between his hands, desperately seeking entry a final time, trying to pull its energy into him. He saw her approaching and snarled, sending a wave of burning magic at her, knocking her to her knees.

“Not like this!” he hissed. “I have walked the halls of the Golden City, crossed the Ages!” She got up, feeling the Anchor call for the orb. She just needed to get into range. “Dumat, Patient One, I beseech you!” She raised her hand, feeling the pull like a live thing in her body. “If you exist, if you ever truly existed...aid me now!”

The orb smashed into Corypheus's face, tearing against him in its rush to reach her. The weight of it was more than she expected, a stone unlike anything she'd ever felt. Power flooded her veins, filling her with a burning sensation that was both cold and itchy, racing through her body like fire on paper. She could barely breathe over the sensation. She felt heavy and light at the same time, like she could fly or perhaps hurtle like a missile. The orb hovered over her hand, the swirling

eddies carved into it lining up with the Anchor, increasing the feeling tenfold. She stood and watched Corypheus fall to his knees. She felt just as shaky.

It took a stupendous effort, but she raised her hand high, lifting the orb and the Anchor towards the Breach, willing it to close for good. The outpouring of magical energy made her scream. Then the orb went dark and landed heavily in her hand. “Solas!” she hollered. “I can't...”

He was there, cradling her arm, drawing her close and fitting his hand under hers to take the orb before it dropped. There were no words for her relief when he took it from her, leaving her standing to finish Corypheus off. The stones being held up by the Breach began to fall, smashing into the Temple. The ground under them shook as it began to drop back from the sky, but it was a controlled descent and she knew Solas was probably helping that. She couldn't risk looking as she went to Corypheus, eye level with her on his knees.

“How?” the Magister asked. “How did you wield it? You are nothing...a nobody.”

“I walk at the side of Fen'Harel,” she said. “And with his Anchor I can give you your heart's desire. You wanted into the Fade?” She reached out her hand, letting the power flow out of her, striking the darkspawn squarely in his chest. The green light of the Fade began to glow inside him, leaking out through every orifice and crack in his mutated body. “Here you go.”

With a sickening crunch of bone and sinew, Corypheus began to implode as she sealed him into the rift she'd opened in his heart. Silence fell as he disappeared within it and she slumped to the ground.

Chapter End Notes

Fear not, gentle reader, that this is anything remotely close to the end of this story. We're a little more than halfway there. As of this posting, I'm working on chapter 82, if that gives you any idea of how much is left.

It Changes Everything

Chapter Notes

8/28/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The ruins of the Temple settled back onto the ground with a thump and a rumble. Carly barely paid attention, cradled in Solas's arms. "I'm so tired, ma fen."

"I know you are," he whispered, pressing his lips to her temple. She could tell he was tired too, his voice was shaky and he hadn't offered to heal her bumps and bruises. The Veil remained, and his prodigious mana was tapped. He'd used it all up shifting into his wolf form, although proximity to the Breach probably mitigated how much energy it took.

"Ew, dragon gunk in my hair," she managed to tease, turning her thoughts away from that. He huffed through his nose. He'd wiped most of his face clean and rinsed out his mouth a couple times, but he was streaked with it still, his armor nearly black from it. Bull and Cass hadn't approached yet, so it was just them, alone in the place where the final blow had been struck. She looked out across the space at the orb, resting peacefully on the ground. "Why is it dark?"

"Because it is empty."

"What do you mean?"

"The power held within it is gone."

"Gone where?" He leaned over her shoulder, meeting her panicking eyes with a sardonic gleam in his. And it dawned on her why Corypheus asked how she could wield the orb. The Anchor was a key; she'd unlocked it and absorbed it herself. "Oh."

"Oh', indeed."

"That's...problematic."

"I believe I understand now why you think the Anchor will kill you. A mortal was not meant to bear this power."

"You'll have to take it back. And soon."

"I do not yet have the strength." He helped her sit up now that the Temple was safely on the ground again. She knew soon enough the others would come barreling in for her attention but she wanted to finish the conversation before then.

"Fuck. We need Flemeth, but you have to promise me not to take *all* of her power. I'll be pissed."

"Let us not worry about that now, vhenan," he said, ignoring her chiding. "You have won a great victory. Give this moment its due." He gave her a quick grin. "I did not leave."

"No, you didn't." He pulled her to her feet, holding her steady as her energy waned. He gathered up

the orb, fitting it neatly into the palm of his hand and together they stumbled from the wreckage.

“Inquisitor, are you alive?” Cassandra called up to them.

“Yeah, I am.”

They went down the stairs slowly, and Carly looked out to see all the faces of her companions and the army of the Inquisition waiting for her. It was a triumphant moment, but she was battered, sore and filthy. All she wanted was a nap. She conjured up a smile and the cheering began.

“Casualties?” she asked Cullen as soon as she saw him with the list. He gave her an absent nod, looking over the names. They both knew it was far fewer than it could have been.

“We routed them, Inquisitor. It was...”

“Almost like they wanted to be beaten, yeah. Makes me wonder how many of them had started realizing Corypheus was truly insane and letting him attain godhood was not in anyone's best interest.”

“Perhaps enough to turn the tide.”

“Perhaps. I know we have Samson in custody. I'm still debating what I'm going to do there.” She held up her hand before he could say anything. “It's not up for discussion right now, Commander. Suffice to say I probably understand his reasoning for following Corypheus better than you do right now. It will get dealt with, just...not right now. The Inner Circle all made it through okay?”

He nodded again. “Hawke will recover from her wounds.” He gave her a look that encompassed many yet to be answered questions. “I assume you're aware of her tendency to jump into a fight.”

“I am, yes.” She could see he wanted to ask, and she knew she should let him, but a yawn escaped her instead. He smiled, and it broke the tension.

“No one else among your companions sustained serious injury. Go on, Inquisitor. I have this handled. You need some rest. We'll talk later.”

“Thank you, Cullen.” They both knew she wasn't thanking him merely for letting her go.

She was trying to sneak away to her chamber when Cassandra caught up to her. “Inquisitor Lavellan, we must speak.”

“Right,” she sighed. No rest for the wicked. She gestured towards Cass's office. “Let's go.”

The Seeker made sure the door was firmly closed before she spoke. “Regarding what we saw...”

“Yes?”

“What is he? That was a demonic form. Six eyes, unnatural strength. Was it magic? That was no spell I've ever seen in a Circle.”

“No, that was all him. Well, a side of him, I suppose.” She cradled the jawbone in her hand. She had a feeling Solas had been slightly underselling its power, since she'd taken no worse injury than some bruises from the stones that fell on her. Most of her aches and pains were from using the Anchor. She looked back up to Cassandra and pointed at her vallaslin. “Do you know who marks these are?”

“No. I have never asked because...it seemed very personal to you.”

She smiled. “It wouldn't have made much sense to you anyway. And probably would have made things a whole lot more confusing around here before its time. These are representative of Fen'Harel, the Dalish god of trickery and betrayal.”

“Why would you wear such a thing?”

“The Dalish are missing half the story, and lost a lot of what they did know to Tevinter after the fact. Fen'Harel does not mean 'Dread Wolf', it means '*Rebel* Wolf'. He isn't a trickster, well...okay, he is to a degree, but he didn't trick the world, nor is he evil incarnate the way so many legends paint him to be. He is at heart a freedom fighter, freedom from slavery, from war and destruction. A fighter for the fate of his people. And he's been beside us the whole time.”

Cassandra thumped into her chair in shock. “*Solas?*”

“Yup.”

“And you knew. You knew this about him. All this time.”

“Yeah, I knew. At first I hoped he'd be able to get me home, to my world. But we never found out how I got here in the first place, so we don't know how to get me back. And honestly, I don't want to go now.”

“Solas is a living god.” She couldn't seem to get past that part. It seemed to erase all her questions about Carly's own origins.

“Eh, kinda. It's complicated. He *is* a master of the Fade, an incredibly powerful mage compared to the modern versions, well versed in political uprisings, secretive to a fault. Deceptive, yes. Not a liar unless you count by omission. If he had walked into Haven after the Breach opened and said, 'Hey, you know that big explosion? Yeah, that was kind of my fault,' you would have killed him. And Corypheus would have won. He needed you at every step, just like he needed me.”

“This changes everything.”

“Not really. He isn't going to start burning down Chantries or fomenting mass rebellion. Okay, he might, but I'm trying to convince him not to do that all in one go.”

“Why?”

“For one thing, mass rebellion would just start another war.”

“No, I mean, why is he here? What was his intention with the orb?”

“The Veil is collapsing, Cassandra. And he would know, he made it.”

“He did *what?*!”

“Immortal, remember? Stop thinking of him as a mortal mage. He's older than human occupation of Thedas. He made the Veil. He had good reason to at the time. And his plan now is to take it down.”

The Seeker stood abruptly and began to pace, her feet heavy on the floor like she was stomping. Her limp became more evident. Carly waited. She knew this was all going to come out sooner or later. And she hoped Solas wouldn't be angry at her for telling it, but it needed to be done. The

more able she was to convince the Inquisition to help, the less time they'd waste in the long run. There was still probably a Qunari plot to thwart in the near future.

"Then demons would overrun the world. How is that different than Corypheus?"

"Because demons aren't actually a thing, Cassandra. Pulling spirits forcibly across the Veil corrupts their purpose. No Veil, no corruption." Oh, she was fully aware that was a simplification in terms of a lot of things, but she figured that was as much as Cass would be able to digest just now. "Spirits want to live freely just as we do. The Veil hinders that."

"I do not understand."

"I know. And I won't ask you to just take my word for it either, because I feel like maybe trust isn't something you have a big store of right now. But I will say this. Nothing is going to happen for a while. Years maybe. We have a lot of cleaning up to do, rogue Venatori to hunt down and I'm pretty sure there's a couple of Inquisition missions yet to finish."

Cass turned a sharp stare on her. "What do you mean?"

"Let's just say there's unfinished business that I know about that hasn't happened yet. Some earthquakes to unravel, an Avvar plot. Hell, a Qunari plot."

"That is a lot of work ahead of us. Are you sure about it?"

"Sure and certain? Not at all. This timeline is muddy from my own. But I can assure you that for now, we'll have some peace."

"Peace." She tilted back her head and closed her eyes. "Maker give me strength. It would be nice to have peace, even if it does not last long. It would be nice to have a Most Holy to lead us. It would be nice to understand exactly what you are and how you got here."

"Yeah, about the Divine. You know they asked me to weigh in on that, right?"

"The Chantry?"

"Yes."

"Have you decided?"

"I have. I don't know if you'll like it."

"Leliana."

"Yes."

"She has many ideas of how to change the Chantry. I do not know if I agree with them. But if the future is going to be so unsettled, and now I have learned a living god walks among us, a god of the elves..." She shook her head. "I am not the right person to lead the faithful into this new era. I am too rigid in my views and discipline." She smiled sadly. "I am honest enough to admit this."

"For what it's worth, Cassandra, in another world, another era, you would have been a good Divine. I know this."

"From your world?" The look in her eye was challenging.

"Yes." Carly stood, feeling exhaustion pull at her like lead weights. "I would ask you to keep this

to yourself for now. I know craziness is the norm for Thedas, but there are limits to what I think the common folk can handle.”

“Of course, Inquisitor. You may rely upon my discretion.”

“Thank you. I'll leave you now, and I'll get Varric onto writing that next chapter for you.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Swords and Shields. He hadn't planned to finish it. But I'll twist his arm for you.”

“*What?! He was going to leave it...*” She blushed furiously all of a sudden. “How did you even know I read it?”

Carly gave her her best mysterious air. “I just knew.”

The Seeker burst into laughter at last. “There are many sides to you that I did not know were there. I am happy to see them, even if they are...confounding.”

“We'll work on it. I'll still need you around here.” She stifled another yawn. “And now I'll say goodnight. I'm dead on my feet.”

“Of course.” Cass briskly went to the door to open it, her energy level making Carly just feel like a lump of suet. “Inquisitor, please know that you still have my support.”

“Thank you, that means a lot.”

“Goodnight.”

Carly escaped and stumbled to the back of the Great Hall where her entirely too many flights of stairs began. She slumped against the wall and scowled at them, wondering if she could just make herself fly since she was chock full of Elvhen magic. The thought was enough to raise her spirits, and she laughed to herself as she pushed her tired legs up, one step at a time.

Chapter End Notes

Before I even had a story, I had this idea: Why does Solas say that repairing the orb wouldn't replace what had been lost? Because it's already in the Inky.

Of course, as players, we're led to think it's because it dispersed when it broke or whatever, but I think the power goes into the Anchor. I think that's what makes it so unstable after he leaves. It's still his magic and when he's around he can control it to a degree. He certainly does when you meet him at the end of Trespasser.

Oh, and how are we feeling, fellow DA fans, after that teaser dropped? For myself, I'm left hoping we're finally gonna get more dwarven lore after all those environment shots with dwarven architecture in them. I have no comment on Solas's HD concept art.

Retaliation on Swift Heels

Chapter Notes

9/1/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A spate of messages went back and forth for Carly in the next weeks in between attempts to make plans – both for the clean up that was inevitably coming and to celebrate their victory. Meanwhile, the clan she allegedly belonged to was being harassed by mercenaries posing as bandits. The Lavellans had sought refuge with the Duke of Wycome, but were trapped now. Illness was spreading through the city, humans falling strangely afflicted and dying from causes that seemed random and a rumor began that the elves of the alienage – in conjunction with the Dalish – were behind it, since they were all healthy.

She knew what it actually was, of course. It was red lyrium in the wells. Duke Antoine was being held hostage by Venatori forces. Carly could only guess that their aim was to exact revenge on her for killing Corypheus by making her clan scapegoats to their plans.

She jolted as pain shot up her arm and looked away from the latest missive from Josephine to where Solas was working on the Anchor, pulling his magic from it and into himself. “I’m sorry,” he said. “There are...tangles.”

“It’s embedded too deep, is what you’re saying.”

He sighed. “Yes. After Haven...the Anchor was unlocked further. It shouldn’t have happened. On your own you would not have managed it.”

“Cuz I’m not a mage.”

“Correct.”

“And now you can’t pull it out of me without killing me.”

“Also correct, vhenan. Certainly not as I am now.” He sounded tired and a bit sad and she smiled at him, accepting her fate. She’d known all along, after all.

“I know you’ll take it back, ma fen. You just need more magical *oomph* first. It won’t be pretty, but I’ll live.”

“I will not leave you maimed,” he said, vehement and nearly snarling.

“Why do you think I haven’t let Dagna leave yet? A pretty little prosthetic could be a good look for me. Dagna thinks well outside the box too, I’m sure she’ll come up with something spectacular.”

He frowned at her now. “You are making light of this, but I can feel the fear inside you.”

“And the dipping takes an ugly turn,” she retorted. Solas sealed his hand over hers, bathing it in

healing waves. The pounding of her pulse under the Anchor eased and she relaxed without having realized she'd tensed up.

“Would you rather hide your fears behind a mask?” he asked gently. “We have agreed not to do that with each other.”

She leaned on him. “You're right. And yes, I'm scared of losing my arm. But I've had a long time to come to terms with it.”

He finished up what healing he could do and held her hand in his. He'd done a good job. Still, there was a buzzing under her skin that she couldn't ignore. It reminded her a bit of when she had her appendix out as a teenager and was given morphine in the hospital for the pain. It both burned and itched in her very blood. She was a little worried that she knew *why*.

Corypheus tried to forcibly open the orb by using red lyrium. And she'd absorbed that along with the magic. The only thing that surprised her was the fact that she didn't hear strange voices or music.

I might once we reach Wycome, she thought.

“What are you thinking, vhenan?”

“Oh, you weren't following that?” she asked, too sweetly. He gave her a hard stare. She made an apologetic face, knowing she was being unnecessarily cranky with him. He couldn't help but hear her thoughts any more than she could help carrying around all his stored up magic. She tried to tell herself that soon enough he would take it back, and their mental connection would be severed. She didn't know if she would regret it or not.

“Your mind is racing.” He settled himself around her on the sofa in front of the fireplace, tugging her so she rested against him. He ran his fingers through her hair, loose and curling on her shoulders. His touch was comforting and soothing and she relaxed into it. “What are you thinking?”

“I'm thinking that this is going to be a mess. Clan Lavellan is being systematically persecuted because I killed Corypheus. The remaining Venatori are holding Duke Antoine hostage, I would assume, and they're poisoning Wycome's population with red lyrium.” She held up her hand. “And I'm poisoned already.”

“Fenedhis.”

“Hey, this one isn't your fault.”

“Which implies the rest of it is.”

“If the foot wrap fits...” she said, then laughed at his sour exhalation. “Oh, stop. You know I don't hold it against you.”

He sighed and held her tight. “You know you truly should.”

“Maybe. But I don't. I don't hold grudges. That's taking poison and hoping the other guy dies. And what was that about not hiding things from each other?” She nestled against him, turning onto her side so she could look up at him while sprawled across his chest. Granted, all she could really see was the underside of his sharply angled jaw, but that was still a view worth taking in, in her opinion. She reached up and traced her fingers along its edge. “Hey, I know I'll be all right. I knew all along that eventually the Anchor would have to go, and the only way for you to take it would be

to rip it free. I also know that meant I'd lose the arm. From about the elbow, although I might get lucky since we already know it needs to be done and I won't be waiting years for it."

"You are remarkably calm about it," he noted.

She shrugged. "In a magical realm, there are magical solutions. I'm right handed anyway. Back to the point, Corypheus tried to unlock the orb with tainted lyrium, and I got a dose of it when I absorbed it. Which means I'll be suffering right along with Cullen through some withdrawal. Priority still needs to be getting this shit dealt with in Wycome. The Venatori need to be crushed."

"That's rather bloodthirsty of you."

"No, it's not that. The clan is innocent in all this. I'm not really a Lavellan, but no one knows that but a handful of Inquisition leaders. That doesn't mean I see them as expendable. And if we don't completely subdue the Venatori, they'll just make more trouble, even without their leader. I want to disband the Inquisition eventually. I can't do that if we're still facing opposition."

He hummed a thoughtful sound. "Tactical. I didn't know you had such an agile mind for it."

"You've watched me play chess."

"Hmm," he hummed teasingly. "Your win over Bull was an accident, I even heard you admit that."

"Yes well, I'm all for lucky breaks. This situation is more like foreknowledge at play."

"Making your own luck."

"Yeah, something like that."

"What do you plan to do?"

"Make an example of the Venatori forces," she said softly. "Public execution by Fade nuke."

"Carly...that is unwise."

"But necessary." She knew what he was thinking. The more she used the explosive power of the Anchor, the more it would injure her. But it would certainly send the right message and hopefully the remnant Tevinter forces would think twice before crossing her. There was no room for mercy here; the ringleaders needed to be removed. And in a highly publicized and unforgettable way.

And it went according to plan. Without Corypheus to lead, the Venatori were scattered and almost aimless, striking out now with an eye for revenge that was blind to logic and reason. Zealots, the lot of them. Between Cullen's forces, Leliana's spies and Josephine's contacts, they rounded up all the leaders they could get their hands on, as well as the stockpile of red lyrium. Clearing the wells had been the work of dwarves quickly hired for the job through Varric's contacts in the Merchant's Guild. Carly had all of it, and the Venatori, transported to an open field where the explosion would do the least damage to the surroundings.

In typical Free Marcher fashion, the whole thing took on a carnival atmosphere, not that she could really blame anyone. Sudden relief after such a scare would naturally lead to a need to release that somehow. Duke Antoine was so relieved to be free of being imprisoned in his own home that he welcomed them like nobility, including the Lavellan clan. They'd declined, however, and stayed in their aravels, although they'd moved into the city and taken over a large park. Carly posted some of

the Inquisition forces with them and only she and the Inner Circle stayed with the Duke.

The day of the execution dawned bright and sunny, the heat of summer not yet taken over the day. She wore her Inquisition uniform, the colors bold and distinctive. Her entire retinue was dressed alike, allowing no idea that the Inquisition was not unified in this cause. No one had gainsaid her, and everyone in the Inner Circle agreed that this was best course of action to disrupt any further plans of retaliation on the part of the defeated Tevinter sect.

She stood on a platform overlooking the stockade where the Venatori were being held, along with the unshielded containers of lyrium. She'd debated on that, knowing the thrall of the stuff was dangerous, but having it cocooned in protective cases would prevent her from destroying it properly. It called to her, now that she was in its presence, a whisper in the back of her head, sinuous and seductive. From the corner of her eye she saw Varric shudder. He could feel it too and she remembered how it had affected him when he took the fragment from his brother's home in the game. She wondered how that had played out in real life.

Bull, Dorian and Solas stood with her on the platform, forming a sort of honor guard. Bull's presence was obvious, his bulk would dissuade even the craziest dissenter from doing something stupid. Dorian was there as a representative of Tevinter's public condemnation for the Venatori. And Solas...well, Solas was an obvious choice to anyone who knew them. Not to mention she didn't know how she would feel afterwards and might need healing.

She didn't bother to make any speeches or allow any last words from the condemned. She met their eyes, cognizant that she was about to kill in cold blood, for all that she was dressing it up as execution. The lyrium sang louder in her mind and she nearly lost her concentration. Solas put a hand on her shoulder, his resolve flowing into her through that touch, blotting out the siren call of the lyrium. She felt the power of the Anchor grow almost unbearably in her hand and raised it.

The blast went off like the bomb it was. The Venatori literally exploded from the force of it, the splats and anguished cries drowned out mercifully by the concussive sound of the Anchor going off. The sight of the bodies was partially distorted by the green glow of the magic racing from her, for which she was grateful. The containers of lyrium shattered into shrapnel and the lyrium itself exploded outwards, stopped only by a barrier from both Dorian and Solas at the last second. The song amplified for an endless moment, the sound of it overcoming everything else, then fell silent.

She slumped against Solas and whispered, "Burn it all."

Chapter End Notes

I'm kinda meh on this chapter. I feel like I didn't quite capture the feeling I was going for, but no amount of editing or even rewriting it made it better. *shrug*

Happy September! For those among you heading back to school, or have already started - either as students or teachers and staff - be safe.

Take This Name

Chapter Notes

9/4/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Inquisition forces stayed in Wycome for a few days, quelling the last bits of rumor and any misplaced violence against the city elves and the Dalish, seeing to it that fresh, clean water was available to the area and simply resting.

Or at least, Carly was resting.

The clan had welcomed her, and Solas too, albeit at a distance. They were grateful for her aid, but it wasn't lost on her that the adult clan members looked sideways at her vallaslin, and judged silently that her apostate companion wore none at all. And of course, there was no *telling* them. Not yet. Although she was positive he'd begun recruiting in the alienage.

She slept most of those first two days. Using Mark of the Rift always wore her out. Solas had done what he could to keep the damage minimal, but they both knew it was just a matter of time before it wouldn't help anymore. She woke on the third day and sat in front of the aravel she shared with him to have breakfast, watching the clan get their bearings back to normal. Children raced around, their voices happy as they tagged each other in some unnamed game. The adults wore less strained expressions today, she saw, although none had come to speak with her just yet.

None but the Keeper, approaching on steady feet, their staff thumping into the ground every other step. Carly rose to greet them and was waved back with an imperious hand.

"I sent my First to the Conclave, but the person who returns is not the one I sent," Deshanna said without preamble.

"No, hahren," Carly said, not bothering to deny it. Deshanna sank down onto haunches in front of her, wizened fingers tracing the markings on her forehead. "Ir abelas, I expect your First died in the explosion."

"Who are you?"

"Carly Mayers, Inquisitor and standing as the Herald of Andraste," she said. "I fell out of the Breach. The Inquisition assumed I was clan Lavellan since it was known you'd sent someone and I had vallaslin, and I didn't tell them otherwise."

"Perhaps wise of you, in a time of distrust for strangers." The Keeper leaned back on their staff and Carly offered the overturned log she was using as a seat. The Keeper shook their head, preferring, it seemed, to stand tall over her. She could appreciate the power play. "What are your plans for this assumed role?"

"I did what I set out to do, I stopped Corypheus from destroying and remaking the world in his image. My work isn't done, but when it is, I'll disband the Inquisition and focus more on elven matters."

The Keeper's eyes narrowed at her, sharp and decisive for all their age. No one got to be Keeper of a clan without the weight of wisdom and experience. "What elven matters will you be turning your attention to?"

"Freedom from slavery and poverty. Restoration of our history and our place in it."

"That is a mighty task, Inquisitor. You will need political sway and perhaps force. What can you offer the shems to make that possible?"

"I don't know yet. But I'm not alone in it."

Deshanna turned to look at where Solas stood apart from the rest of the camp, his face carefully, *falsely*, impassive as children raced around him like a maypole. All of a sudden he reached out and snagged one into the air. The shrieks of laughter carried to where Carly was sitting and her breath caught. He was...playing with them. She watched him set the child down and the race around him began anew. She could hear now that they were chanting something as they ran and when they got a certain point, he reached out for one to swing through the air. This one evaded his 'capture' and the chant continued amidst cries of success.

"'Tis a game of reflexes," Deshanna explained. "They seek to prevent being caught." The Keeper turned back to her. "He is not Dalish. How does he know this game?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, hahren," she said with a laugh. "I've never seen him so...indulgent. Admittedly, there aren't many children in the Inquisition."

The Keeper made a face, a tightening of their lips and a frown. "None of the People, at any rate."

"Yeah."

"You are a strange pair, oddly well suited in your strangeness. You wear vallaslin forbidden by this clan. And yet...I see little reason to doubt your care and duty to the People."

"A younger elf's fancy," she managed. It was sort of the truth. If she had known just how weird this would all get, she would have probably gone with default Mythal markings. Deshanna gave her another imperious stare, this one totally unreadable.

"I grant you leave to use the name Lavellan," they pronounced after a moment. "It serves us both."

"Ma serannas," she said.

"Tel'serannas," Deshanna said sharply. *Do not be thankful*. "Just as you have sought refuge behind this clan's name, so too will I seek advancement for my clan with your rise to fame. It is mutually beneficial, I think."

"That's...fair."

"You must be recorded. Do you have a preference?"

For a moment Carly didn't know what the Keeper was asking, but it dawned on her as she thought about it. Upon receiving vallaslin as the rite of passage to adulthood, Dalish elves could take on a new name if they wished, mixing legend with history. She remembered how Abelas had come to be called that, and she remembered what he'd called her.

"Da'Fen Carlisle Lavellan," she said firmly. Deshanna glanced at her marks and nodded carefully.

"It is...suitable, I suppose. You will face censure from other clans," they warned. "And perhaps even within this one. It is my job to keep the lore and history, not explain the intricacies behind one person's choices."

"I understand." Carly stood up, brushing herself off as she sensed the conversation was nearly over. "Someday, it will all makes sense, hahren. I promise."

"I will look forward to that day, Da'Fen Lavellan."

The Keeper stumped off then, leaving her to watch Solas still playing with the children. She smiled and walked over to join him. He saw her coming and while she expected some level of weariness or impatience from him, there was none on his face or bearing. He looked rather contented, actually. With what she could guess of immortal races that sought *not* to overrun with world with overpopulation, children were probably rare and precious, no matter their lineage.

"Having fun, vhenan?" she teased.

The children chorused the endearment, their giggles halting the playing as they rushed around her now. Solas looked suddenly smug, as if she'd walked into a trap filled with boisterous puppies. She was bowled over by their sudden rush and they piled on her the way they hadn't with him. Two ended up in her lap, while a third hung over her shoulder. The rest settled in the trampled grass. The bravest of the bunch touched her forehead.

"You got funny vallaslin. Why?"

"I've always been a bit of a rebel," she said, bopping the end of the girl's nose with her finger.

"But he's the Trickster," the child said logically, as if she thought Carly had been crazy to pick such markings.

"Only on his good days. The rest of the time he's just grumpy because smart little girls see through all his cleverness." Solas's huff was lost in the giggles of the children.

"You really got magic in you, even though you're not a mage?" another asked.

She turned up her hand and let them see it, warning them not to touch. It was quiet in her palm, no sparks yet, no lines of green threading up through her veins to disfigure. *There is still time*, she thought and saw Solas stiffen minutely in her periphery. *Don't think about it yet, ma fen.*

"Inquisitor," he said aloud, drawing her attention. "Shall I start our packing? I believe Cassandra wishes to leave today if you are ready."

"Yes, thank you, Solas." He dropped a casual kiss on the top of her head to the children's amusement and her astonishment before he walked off. She wondered if he knew he couldn't keep himself contained with all the questions or if he was worn out after so many children demanding he play with them. Who would have thought he'd play with kids? Certainly never her.

"*When did I say I would save you?*" she remembered from one of his legends. But he did, he saved the children. He always saved the children, the innocent. Rare and precious. It shouldn't have been a surprise.

"You really have to leave?" the child draped over her shoulders asked plaintively.

"I do, da'len. I have so many jobs to finish first before I can come visit again."

“You will come back?”

“Sure, at some point. You're my clan, I'd never abandon you.” She settled herself more comfortably with the kids all over her, and let them pepper her with questions and demands for stories of her adventures.

This was what extended family felt like, she realized. She'd never known anything like it, the only child of only children. It was different than the Inquisition. For all that the Keeper told her flat out that they intended to use her fame as a stepping stone for their own ambitions – and she knew the Keeper would become part of the Wycome city council before long – there was nothing else asked of her. Her worth wasn't decided because of what she could do for them. She was just one of them, her role assumed to be as protector of her people as surely as they would protect her.

No, she wouldn't abandon them. This right here was why she'd wanted to convince Solas to take down the Veil another way. So these children would have a nation of their own again. Maybe now he could really see that. Really, truly see it.

“Tell us about fighting that darkspawn,” she was asked, and she dragged herself away from her inner thoughts towards how to make fighting an immortal Magister suitable for young ears.

Chapter End Notes

There are so many discrepancies in the codex entries about Deshanna I decided to just go non-binary. Plus, nb's exist, and they need more representation in media.

To Adorn My Heart's Desire

Chapter Notes

9/8/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“We've been back a week, ma fen,” Carly said to his reflection in her looking glass. “How did Josie get a full fledged banquet up and ready in a week?”

He snorted behind her and leaned down so their faces were level. “She asked the Sentinels to help her call in all her marks.”

“She didn't!” She was aghast.

“Oh she did. However, I believe some of the impetus was also to coordinate our victory celebrations with Summersday.”

“Oh, right...that's a thing. I tend to forget Thedas has more holidays than just Satinalia.”

He laughed outright and went back to straightening the cuffs of his tunic. She paused in her own ablutions to watch in the mirror. Gone was the drab apostate. Tonight he was every inch an ancient Elvhen. The tunic was silk, fine enough that she could see through it, except for where it was covered in black and silver embroidery so thick it must have weighed a ton. She had no idea where he got it, but from the careful way he moved in it, she figured it must be something quite...*old*. Black buckskin breeches covered his legs. He was even wearing boots, knee high and brushed to an almost velvety texture. The only familiar thing about him was the jawbone, once more hanging against his chest.

“You look damn good in black, you know that?” she said, and grinned at his smug expression.

There was a quiet knock at the door and she watched him go down the stairs to answer. She heard a murmur of Elvish and shook her head. He was taking this entirely too seriously, turning her into some sort of...elf. She mentally snorted at her reflection, barely recognizing herself. *You are an elf, Carly. Recorded and recognized by clan Lavellan.*

“Ma serannas, Abelas,” she heard Solas say and peered over the railing to see Abelas bow, both to Solas and to her when he caught her eyes on him. He had his hood lowered for a change, his white hair startling in the torchlight, braid slithered over his shoulder to hang down nearly to his waist. She smiled at him before he went back out the door below. Then she noticed what Solas had in his hands.

“What are those for?”

“Your hair, vhenan.”

She mock glared at him through the mirror when he came stand behind her again. “What exactly are you trying to make me into anyway?”

He smiled, secretive and sly. “It is the duty of every elven lord to adorn his lady before a feast.

And so I shall do so.”

He set the bundle of flowers down on the vanity surface, the blooms fragile and heady. Jasmine. “Solas, please tell me Abelas did not go all the way to Tevinter for these.”

“I believe it was Rivain, in point of fact. And he went by way of Eluvian before you begin to fret about him traveling alone that far.” He stood behind her, pulling her so she sat up straight, frowning at her to stay still. He began weaving the flower stems into her hair, braiding it so most of it hung down her back, while the sides and top were pulled up. “Pity it isn't longer.”

“It's long enough. I can't remember the last time it was *this* long.”

“Do you not grow your hair as a symbol of strength?”

“Asks the bald man?” she retorted wryly, meeting his eyes briefly in the glass.

He pulled another stem loose from the bunch, pinching off leaves where he didn't want them before going back to...whatever he was doing to her head. “I was not always bald.”

“No?”

“I removed it as a symbol of my mourning for Mythal. I will not grow it back until my work is done, just as Abelas will not allow me to remove his vallaslin for the same reason. I have now spent nearly as many years this way as before,” he finished with a sort of half laugh.

“He didn't want a body, but she asked him to come.”

“Solas, did you ever regret it?”

“Not in a long time. It took getting used to, but now I do not think I would know how to be a spirit again.” He plucked up individual flowers now and threaded them carefully into the tight braids until they formed a crown along the top of her head. She had to admit, the effect was stunning. He fanned the loose ends over her shoulders and leaned down to meet her eyes. “There's my heart.”

“You're enjoying this, aren't you?”

“I am. I have not braided a woman's hair in...” For an instant his expression turned pained and she wondered if she knew. There were too many legends of his relationship with Andruil not to have some kernel of truth in them.

“A long time,” she said aloud and his expression cleared, focusing back on her.

“You may ask,” he said softly.

She made a tiny shake of her head. “I don't want to. What came before doesn't matter. You're mine now.”

He dropped a kiss onto her shoulder and smiled against her. When his eyes met hers again, the look in them was hot. She smiled just as his teeth nipped into her, sharp as always, but blunted by the layers of material between her skin and his mouth. She pouted and he grinned wider, brushing her hair aside from her neck. She tilted her head carefully, not wanting to upset his handiwork, but craving his bite. His lips roved over her skin first, so light she could barely feel it, although her skin puckered with goosebumps and a shiver went down her spine. Then, just when she thought she couldn't bear it anymore, his teeth closed on her, a satisfying nip. She hummed softly.

“Come, stand up. There are laces to be tied.”

She arched her brow at him and received an entirely too calm look back, although his eyes still burned on her. “Why do I get the feeling you're enjoying this more for the anticipation of taking it off me later?”

“Because you are an intelligent woman, perhaps.”

“You are shameless, ma fen.”

“And yet you love me.”

“I do.”

She stood and let the dress flow down to her feet. It was loose, layers upon layers of finely spun cloth, light and airy and perfect for the summer temperatures. It was a reflection of him, black threads over sheer silver. It was gathered at the waist, with open sleeves that wouldn't get in her way but draped gracefully from her shoulders. It had black laces running through it that reminded her of something like a cross between Grecian and medieval corsetry. He cinched the laces one by one, tying them close to her back to let ribbons fall with the flow of the skirt.

“Am I going to pull these every time I sit down?”

“No, I am knotting them properly.”

“Where did this even come from?” she asked. He had arrived tonight with it already in tow, after scowling at her plain button down fitted top and leathers.

“I commissioned it.”

“From who?”

“That is my secret to know, vhenan.”

She turned her head to the side so she could see him as he worked on a tiny ribbon at the base of her spine. “You're ridiculous.”

“But you are lovely.” He stood back and she turned so he could see her fully. His eyes were warm on her and growing warmer. She felt a blush rising in her cheeks. “It needs one more thing, I think.”

“Solas, I already feel like if I move too fast the whole thing will just slide off.”

“I assure you, it will not,” he said, digging through his pack on the bed for something. He turned back to her with a small box in his hands and gestured for her to turn around. She could just barely see him in the mirror now that she was standing, but she wasn't entirely surprised when he draped a necklace around her neck, fastening the clasp of it and pulling her loose hair through it so it lay on her skin. She looked down to see a carved pendant shaped like the head and horns of a halla.

“I love a little halla with spirit,” Mythral said.

She lifted it to feel the texture. “Is it antler?”

“It is.”

“It's beautiful.” Set between the spirals were winking gems, moonstones and pale aquamarine. It

looked like starlight captured between the horns of the sacred animal. “Ma serannas, ma fen.”

He stepped in front of her to see how it lay against her throat and adjusted it so it hung straighter. She couldn't resist the urge any longer and reached up to cup his face in her hands. His cheeks moved under her palms as he smiled and he bent down to kiss her.

“Now you are ready. The finest Inquisitor to grace this castle in centuries.”

“You mean the *only* Inquisitor,” she snarked. He tapped her nose with a reproving finger.

“Don't spoil my fun.”

“Okay, fine, trickster.” She leaned up, lips pursed and he obliged, kissing her again. Finally they broke apart and she slid her feet into soft shoes that sparkled as much as her necklace. She knew then he'd planned this for far more than a week. Hand embroidered and jeweled shoes took way too much time and effort. *Sneaky wolf*, she thought. “Shall we, my love?”

He tucked her arm in his and then went down the multitude of stairs towards the Great Hall. “We shall.”

Chapter End Notes

Yup, an entire chapter about getting dressed. I was in a very self indulgent mood when I wrote this. Tel'abelas.

On another – more recent – note, I wrote this chapter at the end of March, according to my sent email file to my beta. It hasn't gone through that many changes because I was really happy with it. Including that line about Solas looking good in black. And then we got DA4 concept art... I might be crowing just a little bit to myself.

Long Awaited Revels

Chapter Notes

9/11/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Their entrance into the Great Hall caused a ripple of silence to fall on the gathered guests. She saw Orlesian masks side by side with Fereldans sweating in their furs, as well as dignified Chantry folk and various other nobles from all over the Free Marches. And of course, the Inquisition's forces. Her own companions were mixed into the crowd, easily spotted by their various heights and lack of surprise to see her on the arm of an elf. Solas escorted her to the main table where the feast was laid out like a buffet and let go of her arm so she could start. The murmur of voices picked up again around them.

Solas wandered off from her side to speak with the Sentinels, grouped together in a quiet corner of the massive hall. She smiled and shook her head at his retreating back. Leliana joined her at the table.

“We finally have a moment to stop and celebrate,” the Spymaster said. “You know that afterwards you will be busy. Every noble in southern Thedas is clamoring to meet you.”

“Highly ridiculous if you ask me,” Carly said, nibbling the edge of a savory pastry. “I’ve done all the hard work, *now* they want to make nice.”

Leliana gave her a commiserating grin. “They wish to bask in the glory of your victory, hoping it will rub off on them. Everyone knows Empress Celene owes you her life, and her throne. A thousand problems remain, and your opinion will be sought for each of them, whether you wish to give it or not.”

“They may get more than they bargained for.”

“Oh?”

She smiled at the Nightingale. “Not a topic for tonight.”

“Such is the way of things,” Leliana got back on track smoothly. “Previously you were an upstart – a Dalish elf, bearing no magic of your own, but wielding a powerful one – and you were just leading rebels and heretics. Until Corypheus revealed himself, they could not see the hand behind the chaos. Once he did, they knew. A Magister and a darkspawn in one creature – the ultimate evil. Now *you* are the only power left standing.”

Carly glanced to where Solas and the Sentinels were engaged in conversation. She had no doubts on the topic. Plans must be made to move forward to rebuilding an elven nation before they took down the Veil. Where better to start than an entire army of ancient Elvhen?

“Not the only power, Leliana, just the most visible,” she murmured.

“That may be so,” the Nightingale said, following her eyes and landing on Solas. She smiled. “Enjoy the evening while you can, Inquisitor.”

Leliana walked away, disappearing into the throng. Carly finished off her plate, knowing she wasn't likely to get another chance. Then she gathered together an enticing array of tidbits to give to Solas, knowing full well he wouldn't stop to eat on his own unless she pushed it. She joined his side with the Sentinels and smiled at Abelas, whose face wore a less grim expression than usual.

“Am I missing anything important?” she asked pointedly. Solas took the plate from her outstretched hands and smiled.

“Perhaps.”

“Don't foment rebellion just yet, ma fen. Let me have one night of peace, I beg you.” Abelas actually snorted, and quickly tried to hide the glint of humor in his eyes. Carly beamed at him and leaned her head against Solas's arm for a just a second. “All right, I'm off to do my duty as hostess. Please try not to look like you're all plotting against the nations of Thedas, if you could? I don't want to have to scrape Josephine off the floor in a messy puddle of stress.”

Solas leaned over and kissed her temple. “As long as you save me a dance, vhenan.”

“You're remarkably easy to buy off, my love. You have a deal.”

She saw Cullen standing by himself and headed in his direction, stopped only occasionally by well wishers from the nations she'd saved from certain ruin. It was quite a while before she reached her Commander's side.

“Is it my imagination,” he said when he saw her, “or do we finally have a minute to breathe?”

“It's not your imagination. How are you doing?”

His eyes were shifty in the crowd, although he hid it well. “I'm...getting there. The nightmares never stop.”

“I wish I could do more.”

He favored her with a warm look. “Your faith in me was more than enough, Inquisitor.”

And that was the best she could manage, since he nodded respectfully and walked off. Casting a look around, she saw Hawke and Varric at the nearest table and took a chance to sit down.

“Enjoying the adulation of the masses?” Hawke asked, a twinkle in her eye. Carly gave her a mock annoyed scowl before they all laughed.

“One big clusterfuck, isn't it?” she said.

“I've been starting to think about putting all of this into a book. 'This Shit Is Weird – the Inquisitor Lavellan Story'. What do you think?”

Carly snorted while Hawke rolled her eyes. “If anyone could put a spin on this, it will be you, Varric.”

“He just wants an excuse to hang around,” Hawke said over his rather flimsy protestation. “We *do* have a life to get back to, darling.”

“Hopefully not soon. I'll miss having you two around. It's nice having someone to drink with that isn't Bull.”

Hawke barked out a laugh and raised a tankard. “I can get behind that, for sure.”

“Well, I can't promise we'll stay forever, Marian is right. We'll have our hands full with relief efforts in Kirkwall as soon as we get back. That said, I still want you to get in on at least one game of Wicked Grace before we go.”

“The Champion and her dwarf. There's a story for you, Varric.” He snorted. “I make no promises on the Wicked Grace, but...we'll see. I'll see you two later.”

She saw Cole sitting on the end of the next table, his legs swinging beneath him and his face hidden under his hat. She wondered how many people even knew he was there. She leaned against the table in a casual way, just in case he was currently invisible.

“They're all happy,” he said. “There's still fear, but you helped them all. You healed the hurt. They don't want to forget what happened, even if it would be easier. The nightmares frighten them, but it's important that they remember.”

“I know, sweetie.”

“I think I could return to the Fade if I tried, I feel light enough to slip through.” His head came up, and his pale blue eyes met hers. “Your work isn't done yet. There is so much more to do before he is ready. You will need someone to...make you laugh sometimes, it helps you forget. I'd like to stay, if that's all right with you. I can still help.”

“You will always be a help, Cole. And this will always be your home, as long as it's ours.”

“Thank you.”

She mingled some more, already being bombarded by nobles for her opinions on everything from the harvest to sweeping political changes, and endured some snide remarks on being elven that she didn't rise to. She saw Dorian and Bull further down at the end of a long table, the Qunari sitting while Dorian stood at his shoulder, pretending to look bored. She extricated herself from her latest conversation and made her way to them.

“How are my lovebirds enjoying the party?” she asked, slipping between the table and the bench to sit down again.

“You're one to talk, my dear,” Dorian said. “You're quite the pair in your matching finery. I never knew he had it in him. The flowers are a nice touch.”

“Too bad we couldn't get any onto Bull.”

“Hey!”

She grinned at his glare. “What, you wouldn't want a crown of lovely pink roses, complete with thorns?”

He huffed. “All right, maybe you have a point.”

“You know, I was *hugged* this morning,” Dorian said. “By a serving girl, no less. Laundry everywhere. She even squealed when she did it. This is your influence, I'll have you know.”

Carly eyed him and crossed her arms. “Complaining about being a beloved hero?”

“Yes,” Dorian said vehemently. “I'm not a...”

“Softie?” Bull interjected. “You know you are, kadan.”

“Shush, you great lummo. You're no better.”

“Damn right. Just don't go spouting about it.”

“Are you two staying a while?” Carly asked.

“Probably,” Dorian said, with an air of nonchalance that she wasn't buying for a second. She knew what was in her friend's future, and that he wanted to put it off as long as possible. “Tevinter lacks the presence of my best and only friend, not to mention...”

Carly exchanged a look with Bull, who looked inordinately smug. “Good. There's loads of more work to come.”

“Lovely,” Dorian drawled.

“All right, Boss. Will there be more fighting?”

“Undoubtedly.” She wondered if she should say anything to the former Ben-Hassrath or just let it come as it would. Not tonight, there was plenty of time to get things in order before he'd be forced to turn on his own kind. “I'm glad you're both staying. I'll need you.”

Bull's expression turned more serious, and she wondered if maybe that was enough. He was canny behind that eye patch. He nodded once and Dorian jolted as he put his arm around his legs. Carly smiled and shook her head at them both. “You'll do, you two.”

“I'm not sure what, but I promise it will be spectacular, whatever it is,” Dorian said, waving his wineglass around.

The next person she talked to was Vivienne, as always cool in her robes, her expression supercilious as she took in the crowd. It softened slightly when Carly stopped at her side. “My dear, I will say it. We have not always seen eye to eye, but we would not be here to disagree without your immense work and sacrifices.”

“Thank you. I mean that.”

“I shall soon take my leave and return to Orlais. There is much work to be done.”

“There is. And for all that we have disagreed on, we wouldn't be here without your contributions as well.”

Vivienne nodded regally and Carly moved on. She saw Josephine, still carrying around her notepad, still looking frazzled beyond belief. Carly took her arm before she could go off on another dizzying turn of the Great Hall.

“You did an excellent job putting this together on short notice, Ambassador. Do you think for one night you might just enjoy the fruits of your labors?”

“I couldn't, no. There are the pastries yet, and the port is running low and...”

“Josie.” She reached for the writing board, careful not to set herself on fire with the candle. “Go dance with Thom.”

“What?”

“You heard me. Consider it an order from your Inquisitor. If Solas is going to get me on the floor in public with him, you can dance with Thom.”

"I shouldn't..."

Carly fixed her with a commanding stare that she knew carried little weight. But it worked and Josephine walked away towards where the warrior was lounging near the fire. It didn't take long before she saw them move into the center of the hall where other couples were dancing. Sera sidled up to Carly's side.

"Look at that. Shite, what an adorable couple. We did it, yeah? Saved the world and...everything?"

"Yup, we did."

"Didn't even have time to throw bees at 'im." The elf shrugged.

"You'll always have a chance to throw bees at something, Sera. I have no doubt."

"Pfft, yeah." And she giggled. "Mind you, I make no promise it won't be at your elfy elf's head."

"No, I expect no less."

"Just so's we're clear on it." Sera gave her a searching look, abruptly serious as she could pull from her hat so effortlessly. "What comes next, eh?"

"Rebuilding, fixing all of this."

"Maybe I'll stick around for it, yeah?"

"This is your home, if you want it."

"Stop it, you. I start cryin', I start hittin' people."

"If you say so, Sera." She gave the other woman a push. "Go on, enjoy yourself. Raise a glass for me."

"You're on."

Carly stayed in the little pool of quiet and watched the party around her. Then Solas approached and took her arm to lead her to the floor, stately and slow as if they had all the time in the world. The Great Hall disappeared from her mind and she focused just on him, her face peaceful and happy.

"That is the look I want to see on you always," he murmured.

"It would be nice, wouldn't it?"

"It would." The song ended and the couples parted around them. He started leading them back towards the throne and their chamber door. "But for now, I think we've stayed long enough. I have other looks I wish to see tonight."

"Oh?"

He smiled, equal parts sly and loving. "Oh, yes."

She shook her head at him, and caught a glimpse of King Alistair watching them. "There's one last thing I need to do, ma fen, before you ravish me to death."

Chapter End Notes

The talk between Carly and Alistair can be found here, if anyone is interested.

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/23789257/chapters/64381921>

Tonight, We Are Alive**

Chapter Notes

9/15/20

NSFW

Congrats Twist...we made it to 100K words.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Solas gently closed the door to the chamber behind him and Carly heard the lock click into place with a smile as she climbed the last flight of stairs. He followed her then leaned a hip on the railing to just look at her for a moment as she slipped the jeweled shoes off her feet and reached to take off her necklace. It was quite reminiscent of the look he gave her in the Winter Palace, so long ago. They were barely speaking to each other then, but he'd worn the same expression. Now she recognized it for what it was. Hunger.

“Enjoying the view?” she teased.

“I am.” Without taking his eyes off her he loosened the collar of his tunic and drew it over his head carefully, moving to lay it over the bench of her dressing table.

She gave up on the clasp with a huff and turned to him. “A little help, please?”

He lifted her hair away from her neck carefully so as not to upset the flowers in it and his nimble fingers undid the latch of the necklace so she could catch it in her hands. She placed it on the vanity, standing back just enough to see his reflection in it, the torchlight painting him a warm yellow color that muted the edges of his wolf leg tattoos. But it was his eyes that snared her. If anything, they were more intensely focused than they'd been a moment ago.

“What's on your mind?”

“Ar lath ma.”

She smiled, her expression an invitation that he happily took, closing the distance and reaching for the ribbons on the back of the dress. He pulled them one by one, tantalizingly slow. She watched his face in the mirror, memorizing the details of how his features softened as he worked on the laces binding her into the dress, his eyes warm and loving as the material parted to reveal skin beneath it. He left the dress to hang on her and began working on the long stems of jasmine in her hair, leaving behind the individual blossoms of her 'crown'. He ran his fingers through the locks, untangling what few snarls had wrapped around the pieces before brushing the whole of it to the side, exposing the side of her neck.

He laid a line of sipping kisses along the length of her neck and onto her shoulder, pushing the material aside to reach more skin. She giggled and his arms came around her to hug her from behind. She settled against his chest with a sigh, their skin touching only in the gaps of her dress. “A real romantic hides under all that Fade nerdiness, doesn't it?”

He arched a brow at her in the mirror, meeting her eyes. “Nerdiness?”

“It means scholarly to the point of absurdity. Obsessive. Often awkward...” She trailed off when his teeth sank into the joint of her neck, suppressing a yelp at the suddenness of it. He chuckled behind her. “That was unfair.”

“Perhaps. I do not hear you complaining overmuch.”

His hands slipped around to the back of the dress, gathering the flimsy material together before drawing it down, pushing the shoulders off her with his nose. She was held within it even as he bared her to the waist, eyes gleaming. He let go of the dress and it fell off her hips to pool at her feet, but she wasn't paying attention to that. His hands had risen to cup her breasts and the sight of it in the mirror had left her too brain fried to say anything. His touch was light, teasing. The backs of his fingers brushed the underside of each curve, a whisper of contact. It took no time at all for her to be a shivering mess under it.

He watched her, their eyes locked together, as he trailed one hand down her stomach towards the top of her smalls. His other arm came around her like a band, holding her in place. She bit her lip to his amusement and his hand disappeared into the material, sliding against her skin and between her legs. A gasp left her when he pushed two fingers into her folds, deliberate and drawn-out, the rasp of his skin against her flesh causing more heightened sensation for being so achingly slow. She wanted to writhe away from the touch, her cheeks burning as she watched and a smile crept across his lips.

“Solas...”

“Yes, vhenan?” he whispered into her hair, his hand circling around her clit, rolling against the nub without ever actually touching the most sensitive part of it. “Do you need something of me?”

She whined and pushed the smalls off her hips, letting them drop to her feet with the dress. His hand spread across her sex, fingers seeking entrance. Her legs grew restless with the need to be wrapped around him. And he knew, she could see it in his eyes. He dipped, once, twice, then withdrew completely, leaving her gasping. He stepped away from her, undoing the waist of his breeches. The leather parted and hung low on his hips, his cock peeking out over the top. He went back to holding her against him, his hand sneaking back to tease and torture, his hardness pressed into her back. She leaned against him, bending slightly forward, aching for more.

He chuckled against the back of her neck, hips thrusting against hers until she whimpered. And then he was gone, and she looked back to see him folding himself gracefully on his heels, his hands winding around her calves, guiding her feet out of the confines of the puddle of her clothes.

“Come here,” he said, rough and urgent. She caught a glimpse of his cock straining against his belly, bobbing in time to his heartbeat. Then he was turning her, tugging her legs apart so she stood over him with her back to him.

“Why do you love to be at my feet, ma fen?” she managed before his teeth closed on the back of her thigh, sharp and sudden. Her gasp was loud, just as his pleased sound was soft. She felt wobbly. He seemed to know it and drew her down and across his bent legs, his length trapped between them. He shifted her around, as well as himself, and she hissed as he stroked across her waiting flesh. She bucked backwards on him, a quick jolt of need.

He let her lean forward and filled her slowly, drawing her flush to him with his hands on her hips. When he was inside her as far as he could go, he lifted her body with his arms crossed over her chest, trapping her wholly in a tight, steady embrace. She let her head fall back, feeling his lips at the point of her ear.

"All the better for worship, ma vhenan," he whispered just before his teeth closed on the very tip of her ear and he thrust in her at the same time. The sound that came out of her was a cross between a hum and a cry. He rocked her in his lap, never retreating far before he filled her again, each small thrust hitting so deep she could barely breathe.

"Please..." she breathed, not even knowing what she was begging for. He held her steady with one strong arm and let his hand go back to her folds, tracing lightly, just the pads of his fingers wet with her slick. She whined and whimpered, begging without words, without even thought. He held her on that edge for a long time, slow thrusts, gentle fingers circling her nub while never across it. She was splayed across his thighs, unable to even gain any leverage to quicken his too gentle strokes. It built to a coiled tension, making her ache and burn for release.

He waited until she'd given up any pretense of trying to wrestle the pace from him, her legs lax across his, her body leaning fully on his supporting arm, her head lolling and giving off the scent of jasmine still. He drew her back against his chest and found his favorite spot with his teeth, nipping but not hard. It jolted her from her sex drugged stupor and she let out a rush of air just as his finger caressed her clit fully, pressing against it as he rocked harder into her. All at once the coil sprang free and she shouted as she came.

He pushed her off his length as she came down from the high, the sloppy noise their bodies made barely impinging on the shivering mess of her consciousness. He lifted her into his arms, as always effortless, his strength so contradictory to his build. He carried her to the bed and laid her on it, following to cover her, lifting her leg over his hip. She reached for him with weak arms and he leaned in quickly to kiss her, devouring. His eyes were still closed when he pulled away from the kiss and he took his time opening them. There was such an innocence about his face when he kissed her like that and her heart swelled with so much love it took her breath away. Then his eyes were on hers again, and any hint of innocence was lost by the glittering silver blue that saw right into her soul.

"Solas, I love you so," she whispered.

"As I love you," he said. He wrapped a hand around the leg hitched on him, drawing it higher as he sank back into her with a groan. She lifted into him, dredging up energy from somewhere as the heat began to build anew.

He braced himself with an arm over her shoulder, raising himself just high enough that his jawbone necklace lay on her chest. She smiled up at him, at the gleam in his eye. And he *pounded* into her, shifting them upwards on the bed, curling into her as she met each stuttering jolt with her own. He lifted her other leg high, leaning back on his heels, tugging her body to follow arched up, powerless to do anything but take what he gave her. She came apart with a splintered cry, white hot pleasure flooding her body until she could make no further sound. She clenched tight on him, imploding on his length and he groaned as he followed, spilling deep within her.

He collapsed on her, resting his head on her chest to listen to her heart slow. She had just enough strength left to drape her hands across his shoulders, slick with sweat. Their breathing was the only sound for a long time before he rolled off her. She turned onto her side lazily, cupping his face and drawing him close to kiss her again.

"I'm so glad we're still alive," she said softly, her voice raw and rough. He plucked the wilted flowers from her hair with a serene smile.

"And I, as well." The scent of the jasmine mixed with their sex and she thought it might be her new favorite thing ever. She closed her eyes and let the weariness claim her. The sound of thumping made her crack one eye open and peer at him sitting at the edge of the far side.

“Ma fen, did you still have your *boots* on?”

He tossed a wry grin over his shoulder at her, standing up to peel the buckskin breeches completely off. “You did not even notice.”

She let out a snort before she lost it and rolled onto her back, laughing out loud, rejuvenated by his teasing tone. He crawled back in beside her and she was still chortling as he tucked her under his chin. “Oh, my darling wolf, ar lath ma.”

“Ar lath ma, vhenan. Go to sleep.”

Chapter End Notes

This had a different ending at first, then I realized I completely forgot to have Solas take his pants off, so...yeah, his line about not noticing was a bit of 4th wall breaking. *cue the gif of Solas doing his side smirk* Yeah, yeah, I know ma fen. I was distracted, okay?

A Piece of Home

Chapter Notes

9/18/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The rookery was quieter than Carly expected for being so full of ravens that had fewer messages to carry these days. She and Kieran exchanged conspiratorial smiles as Leliana shook her head at them with a warning not to disturb her birds, the same warning she'd given them the first time they visited. They promised and passed by the large wicker crates holding the messengers on their way to the roof of the guard tower.

“How much do you remember, Kieran? From...before.”

“All of it,” the boy said, nimbly stepping around a fallen fieldstone chunk. Carly made a mental note not to tell Morrigan about it considering the drop to the ground from here.

“But you don't have bad dreams anymore, right?”

He hummed and nodded, then leaned on the railing to look out across the mountains. “Wow, it's always a surprise. The view, ya know?”

Carly smiled and stood next to him, making sure he didn't lean on the ancient stones too hard. The view *was* breathtaking. Jagged peaks, still blanketed with snow, stretched out for miles along the Frostback range. Deep forests filled with valleys and ravines. Somewhere below their feet were the bones of the place where Solas had made the Veil. She tried to see it as Kieran did, just another bit of the world he was born in. She was still able to see it as a map in her mind's eye, but it was getting harder after so long in it.

“I'll miss being here,” Kieran said suddenly.

“Are you leaving soon?”

“Yes. Mother wants to head west.”

“Your father?”

He nodded again. “Mother said he wants to find a way to cure the Calling.”

“Yes.”

He peered at her over his shoulder, his now normal child's eyes still glimmering with a spark of what he'd been. “You already knew that, didn't you? Will he? Will he get better?”

“I don't know that part, Kieran. It's kinda hard to explain. I only know what happens for the next couple years. Nothing after that.”

“It's hard, isn't it?” he asked, his voice a little lost in the wind. She leaned down next to him, careful with how she put her weight on the railing.

“Yeah, it is. I think I'll be happy when I don't know things anymore too.”

“But you did what you wanted, right?”

She nodded and gave him a grin. “I sure did.”

“What happens now?”

She smiled more broadly. “Rebuilding, some last bits and pieces. A couple dragons.”

He giggled. “Like my grandmother?”

“No, not quite. Just regular ones.”

He laughed at that. Then he fell silent and spent a long time looking out over the mountains. “I miss my father.”

“I miss my parents too.”

“Where are they?”

“They died when I was younger, kiddo.”

“You're an orphan!”

“Yeah. But ya know, I have a new family, in all of you.”

“That's good.”

“Yeah.” She ruffled his hair and he ducked his head, giggles peeling out into the wind. He hugged her suddenly, his little arms around her waist tight enough to squeeze the air from her lungs. At least, that's what she told herself. She hugged him back. “Okay, enough mushy stuff. Wanna go see if Leliana will let you help her feed her birds one last time?”

“Yes!”

She wandered around the market afterwards, trying not to let the constant bowing and scraping get to her. She passed a stall with a single elf sitting by it and stopped to see what she was selling. It looked like fruits and vegetables from Tevinter, if she was remembering correctly. A red, round shape on a vine caught her eye.

“Are these...tomatoes?” she gasped, causing the elf to jump to attention.

“Yes, Your Worship, all the way from...”

“How much?”

“M'Lady?”

“How much for the whole crate?”

“Oh, please, m'Lady...let me...”

Carly caught the elf's eyes. “What's your name?”

“Riella, m'Lady.”

“Riella, before you tell me you won't make me purchase them because I'm the Inquisitor, understand that under no circumstances would I let you go back to Tevinter empty handed and possibly in trouble. Got it?”

“Yes, Your Worship,” Riella mumbled. Carly smiled at her gently.

“How much for the whole crate?”

“A hundred royals, m'Lady,” the girl said very softly, cringing as if expecting a blow. Carly nodded sharply.

“Set them aside for me? I'll be right back.”

“You...you mean it?”

“Of course.” Before the elf could even respond, she was off in a dash to Cass's office. The Seeker looked up at her abrupt approach and watched her go to the coffer that sat locked on the floor within easy sight of her desk.

“Inquisitor, what are you...?”

“I need some cash. It's worth it, I promise.”

“If you say so,” Cassandra said with raised eyebrows.

Carly grinned at her, removed the necessary amount of gold and locked the coffer back up tight. Once she made her purchase and hefted it to the kitchen, she talked with Misyl – now the head cook, for which Carly was grateful – and asked for the largest pan for the ovens she could find.

The Skyhold kitchen staff were used to Carly by now. She often had them make things strange to their eyes, with ingredients they would never have thought to put together, but they didn't complain when the efforts yielded compliments from anyone who tasted them. Pan in hand, Carly set herself up at a bare counter space with a good knife and the crate of precious tomatoes. Gradually the previous chatter among the serving girls and the various cooks resumed as she quartered tomatoes and laid them out.

“Misyl, do we have a good earthy oil that can take the oven heat?” she called at one point. The elf brought her a stone bottle with the stopper pulled.

“Like this?” she asked, holding it for Carly to sniff. It wasn't quite like olive oil, but it would do.

“Perfect. Can you drizzle while I finish these up?”

“Ma nuvenin.” With a deft hand, the cook poured oil on the cut tomatoes. “What is my Lady making?”

“Something wonderful. Now I need salt.”

“On this fruit?” The cook seemed aghast. Carly laughed.

“Yes, on this fruit. Trust me, it will change everything.” She picked up a bit that was too small to stand the roasting and sprinkled it with a few course crystals from the salt cellar and offered it to Misyl. The elf took it cautiously and tasted it, her whole face lighting up when the combination hit her tongue. Carly nodded and wiggled her eyebrows.

"I should know by now not to question my Lady," the cook said, her accent lilting and musical.

"Indeed. All right, I need an oven that's hot enough for bread."

Misyl took the pan from her with a frown and a shake of her head and put it in the right oven. They still didn't think the Inquisitor herself should do such manual labor, no matter how often she tried. The cook brushed her hands together and turned back to her. "Now what do you need?"

Carly grinned. "A large pot for boiling water, the really fine flour and four eggs. Oh, and do we still have that hard Fereldan cheese? The one made from sheep's milk?"

"Yes, my Lady," another of the cooks piped up.

"Perfect."

Once she had the flour and eggs in front of her, she took a moment to remember how to do this. Once upon a time she'd spent entirely too much time watching cooking shows, trying to teach herself to do it better. She made a heaping well of flour and cracked the eggs into it. She mixed them together until she had a shaggy mess and started kneading it until it was a soft ball. She knew the next part was critical – it had to rest, preferably somewhere cold. In Skyhold that meant in the chest Dagna had enchanted with a frost rune. She wrapped the dough in a linen towel and stowed it, judging enough time had passed so her tomatoes were ready.

The pan was brought out in all its roasted glory and she nearly burned her fingertips off peeling the skins before Misyl laughingly told her to be patient enough for them to cool. She hopped up onto the counter to wait, watching them bustle around getting dinner prepared. Without any fuss they'd all moved their preparations to the other end of the broad kitchen, leaving her the nearest oven and counter for her project. She did this so often it had become seamless.

"Hahren!" Misyl exclaimed, breaking into her reverie. Carly turned and saw Solas watching her from the door, a quizzical look on his face.

"Hey there, handsome," Carly said. He came to her side and examined the pan with the roasted tomatoes. When he looked back at her, his eyebrow was raised in a silent question. "You'll see."

"Shall I leave you to it, then?"

"I mean, if you want to stay and watch me work some Earth magic, you can."

"Oh?"

"I am turning this Tevinter fruit into a sauce fit for a king." She turned away and went back to peeling skins from the cooled tomatoes. Sitting on the counter put her at the same height as him and he had to lean around her to see what she was doing. "I need a bowl please, ladies."

Solas took it from the blushing younger cook and Carly scooped the now squishy tomatoes into it with a plop. There was enough of them to fill it. Good, that meant she could make a big batch. She went to the basin to wash her hands, gathering up a handful of garlic bulbs on her way back. She poured a handful of salt into a smaller bowl to leave the cellar with the others and set those down with the tomatoes. Then she retrieved her dough from the chest.

Misyl seemed to know what she needed before she even asked for it, handing her a heavy rolling pin without looking up from her work. Carly chuckled. She quartered the dough into manageable pieces and left the others in the cloth while she rolled one out as thin as she could get it, dusting it often with flour.

“What sort of dish is this, vhenan?”

“Pasta.” Her rolled dough wasn't quite square, but that didn't matter. She dusted it with a fine layer and folded it over itself until it was a tidy bundle she could slice easily. She kept the cuts pretty even, making little piles of loose noodles every now and then before she went back to cut more. Solas watched silently as she worked her way through the other quarters and the nested pasta grew to fill the whole counter.

“Can I help?” he asked finally.

“Yes, actually. I need a pot, a medium one if they aren't using it.”

He returned with one, handling it with the bemused expression of someone who had never cooked in a kitchen in his very long life. She took it and her bowls of assorted ingredients to the nearest free stove top, dumping in the tomatoes, a splash of water from a jug and the small bowl of salt. While that began to break down, she smashed the garlic with the flat of her knife and minced it finely, adding that to the sauce with a briskness that belied how rarely she'd made her own sauce from scratch. She was rather proud of herself.

She stirred the sauce and sent Solas to find her a dry red wine without telling him why. She didn't even spare him a glance before having him fetch the planer and a chunk of the hard cheese. But she could feel his bewildered stare on her back. By now the sauce was bubbling nicely and she poured the wine in, measuring out roughly a cup of it. Meanwhile, her big pot of water was ready and she gathered up several of her nests of pasta and dumped them in, stirring them enough to loosen them up.

She counted out three minutes and used one of the serving forks to hook the cooked pasta out of the water and into a bowl. She spooned up some of her sauce and grated cheese on top of it, wishing she had basil. Next time.

She leaned back against her work counter, too impatient to clean up first – although she would when she was done, another chore the staff didn't think she should do herself. She twirled her pasta expertly under Solas's impressed gaze and took the first bite.

She wondered if he had the first idea of how good it tasted to her. He was watching her with something much more akin to awe now than bewilderment. She twirled up another forkful and offered it to him. He took it cautiously, less experienced with her kitchen projects than the staff. But he gamely tried it, and she saw the look of resignation of it being weird change to satisfaction.

“What do you call this?” he asked.

She shrugged. “It's just spaghetti and red sauce. Well, this is closer to linguine, really, but that's just because my knife skills aren't that good. It's a piece of my home.” She turned to the cooks. “Misyl, you want to try it now that it's all finished?”

“I would, my Lady.”

Solas watched, rather entranced, as the entire kitchen staff came and tried it. In the end Carly had to cook more pasta so she could enjoy a whole bowl of it herself. “For future reference, Misyl, if the market has tomatoes...I want them.”

“Ma nuvenin, my Lady. I will need you to teach me that.”

“With pleasure.”

“Vhenan, you are a wonder,” Solas said. She slurped up her pasta with a twinkle in her eye that made him smile. He pressed a kiss to her forehead, always aware of the eyes on them. Even here in her kitchen full of his spies.

“Just wait til I can make pizza.”

Chapter End Notes

Yup, a couple thousand words of Thedas Test Kitchen. No regrets.

evening edit H O L Y S H I T!!! Y'all...I love you. You've put this fic over 15K hits. Thank you, all of you, from the bottom of my heart.

The Madness of Immortals

Chapter Notes

9/22/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The garden was quieter now that Morrigan and Kieran had departed. Carly found she missed his little boy antics. Mother Giselle was still there, tending the herbs and medicinal flowers, but other than that, Carly was alone. She enjoyed the secluded space, tucked away from the busyness of the rest of the Keep, even now. A scuff of a footstep drew her attention and she smiled when she saw Solas approaching.

“Did you do that on purpose?” She knew quite well that he made no sound when he walked unless he wanted to.

“I did not want to startle you. You seemed lost in thought.” He stopped behind her bench and rested his hands on her shoulders. She leaned her head against him, a small public intimacy that he welcomed more often now. “Might I steal you away?”

“Oh? And where would you be stealing me to?”

“A meeting. One that I think you would prefer to witness for yourself.”

“I’m sorry too, old friend.” The thought went through her head quickly, along with the image of Flemeth’s hand on his cheek. As quick as it was, he still caught it anyway, she could tell by the way his fingers squeezed on her. She looked up at him and he nodded, a small smile crinkling the corner of his mouth.

“Oh,” Carly said. “Um, is that a good idea?”

“She approves of you. She will not object to your presence.”

Carly stood and took his hand when he offered it, leading her to where Morrigan had left her Eluvian. It would remain at Skyhold, of no use to her now that Kieran couldn’t turn back its course from the Fade. Carly figured that was no trouble for Solas, however. And she was right.

They stepped through the mirror and came out the other side into the Crossroads once more. He led her through the maze to the one he wanted, activating and drawing her through the glass and exiting in a sunny garden, completely walled in on all sides. She recognized immediately the spherical trees, bare of leaves, and the tiles on the ground. When she looked up ahead, she saw the figure of Flemeth at a massive Eluvian, her hand glowing against the glass. On one side was a carved statue of Mythal as a dragon, and the other was the howling wolf she had come to associate as Solas in his form as a warrior of the Evanuris, as opposed to the guardian wolf seen everywhere else.

“I knew you would come,” Flemeth said when they got closer. Solas squeezed Carly’s hand before letting it go. The ancient Witch turned and saw her there, a smile forming. “Ah, little halla, it is good to see you.”

“And you, my Lady,” Carly said.

Flemeth turned hard eyes back to Solas, her expression chastising. “You should not have given your orb to Corypheus, my Wolf.”

“I was too weak to open it after my slumber.”

Flemeth raised an eyebrow. “It worked out well enough, I see. She carries too much of our burden.” Carly didn't quite know what Flemeth could see in her, but her bright golden eyes were steady on her now. She beckoned and Carly went without thought, drawn by some unnamed feeling. She let the Witch cup her face in her hands once more, a wash of warmth flowing over her like water, or moonlight. She felt both light as air and heavy as a stone. “You bear it well, little halla. You were not meant for such things, but you bear it well nonetheless.”

“What do you mean?”

Flemeth laughed. “You succeeded in changing him where I could not. As we had need. He will have need of you yet, and so I have gifted you with a life unending, so that you may remain at his side.”

Cold shock ran through Carly and she trembled under Flemeth's touch. She wasn't even sure what her reaction was. Anger? Surprise? Was she bound to Mythal now? Did she still have free will? Was she happy she wouldn't grow old and die on him? Did none of these beings besides him know what consent was? It was too much to process. She couldn't think of anything to say. And before she could wrangle her wildly vacillating emotions, Flemeth let her go and turned to stand closer to Solas.

“Come, Fen'Harel, it is time.” A glow formed between the two of them and she remembered why they were there. *Urthemiel*.

The glow intensified, passing between them until she could barely see their faces in it. When it was over, Flemeth stepped away from Solas as the power settled into him. Just as Carly expected, his eyes took on a new aspect, glowing brightly with the immeasurable power contained in a god's soul. No matter how often Solas maintained that the Evanuris were not gods, they were beings of such strength and ability that there was no other word for them but that. Even the Old Gods of Tevinter, if they were truly part of the Elvhen or merely spirits, had grown in strength proportionate to the worship they'd received. In the end, it didn't matter what they were or what they were called, they were nonetheless something *other* than mortal and finite.

The wreath of smoke around his head cleared and she shuddered. A pit of something like fear opened inside her. He was unstoppable now, and Mythal yet remained. There were two gods walking the earth. And now there was her. Where did she even fit into this?

“Your work is not yet finished, my Wolf. The road to restoration remains long ahead of you. Do not falter now.”

“I will not. I'm sorry it took so long.”

“Time is a relative thing, and you have it on your side.” Something unspoken went between them, an idea perhaps. The inklings of a plan for the future. Carly remembered what Flemeth said about avenging Mythal. How would that play out now? “I will await your word.”

Flemeth nodded to each of them and walked away, disappearing into a cloud of stealth. Carly snorted in spite of herself.

“You know, teleportation isn't supposed to be a magical talent in Thedas,” she said when he glanced at her. “There was someone who broke it down to it *seeming* like disappearing because it's movement so fast the eye can't follow. But she's really running her ass off and we just can't tell.”

“Carly,” he said, mildly reproofing.

“What, if I can't snark my way out of a situation then I'm fucked.” She turned her head to him, seeing the mantle of godhood settle over his features like a new layer of mask. There was simply no other word for it. “And believe me, Solas, I know I'm fucked.”

“Why do you say that?”

“I never asked to be made immortal. I never wanted to be. It's too much. I don't know what to feel about it, or what to react to. I know it's a gift and I shouldn't...be ungrateful. But, how much of my personhood am I going to lose? How long before we get bored with each other, because that seems to always be the inevitable end to any such *long* term relationship? Am I still me? Will I someday turn into the very thing that made you do all this? Will I still age like Xenon, become some twisted, horrible thing that would rather be dead?”

He held her, his heartbeat the same thump under her ear that it had always been. The sound of it calmed her. He was still him, after all. She'd always known that at some point he would be like this. He would carry the immeasurable power of a trickster, clever and unpredictable. “Vhenan, you will never become like the Evanuris. Nor do I think Mythal is cruel enough to bestow this gift for you to suffer. Which is not to say that she cannot be cruel.”

He tilted back her chin, meeting her eyes steadily. “You have been risen up, but it is not something you felt was your due. Your nature as a mortal has not been changed, only the timespan in which to practice it.”

“Yeah, but...Ghilan'nain was risen up too. Don't think I don't know she was fucking insane at the end. Hell, she might have been all along.”

He made a face, not quite an admission, but close. Resignation to the truth of her words, perhaps. “She was already immortal,” he reminded her. “All the Elvhen were. She was...fanatical, I think would be the best word. Brilliant and driven, every bit an artist with flesh as I am with paint. Becoming one of the Evanuris *did* change her. Exposure to the Blight changed her more. She had fewer rules, her morals grew twisted. She was encouraged by the others to great heights, and had no one to stop her.”

But Pride stayed her hand.

“No one but you.”

“No one but me,” he agreed with a huff. “And even I was unsuccessful overall. You are not like her, Carly.”

“How well did you know her?” she asked finally, getting it out after months of wondering. How well did he know any of them?

“Very well, once.”

Suledin Keep came to her mind's eye, the halla statues hovering over the wolf ones, the owls and archers dotting the courtyard. It struck her more as being a retreat for lovers than any kind of fortress. *Endurance*. Solas stroked her hair as he held her and seemed to be patiently waiting for her to get the rest of it out. But she wasn't sure she really wanted to know. Still, he'd once told her

she could ask anything.

“Was she really blind?”

“She was. Her creatures were her eyes. She could see through them.”

She could hear the appreciation in his voice, the pride in her achievements. “Did you love her?”

“I admired her for a time. She persevered through hardship, she was bright and clever. To you, some of her creations must seem horrific. They were. She challenged herself, to garner favor. To prove her worth. She lost her way.”

“And Andruil?”

He pulled back, the better to see into her eyes. His face was rueful. “Andruil was complicated. She, too, lost her way.”

“They all did.”

“Yes.”

“Someday, I'll have the nerve to pick your brain about them. But not today.”

His smile was gentle. “All right, not today. Today, let me share with you this space. Once it was mine, in keeping with Mythal.”

“A sanctuary for friends?”

His smile grew wider. “Yes.”

He led her away from the Eluvians, deeper into the garden. Animals she'd never seen before scurried out of their path, small darting things with bright eyes and clever faces. They were like foxes or hares, and like neither. The garden itself was overgrown, untended for countless years, and yet there remained some semblance of order to the chaos. A riot of rare flowers and tall trees filled the space, making it feel like an entirely different world.

They turned around a bend in the path, between guardian trees that blocked the sight of the place further in, and past them it opened into a glade with a stream running through it from a waterfall. She recognized it.

“You brought me here...in the Fade.” *Searing kisses, a look of sorrow, anger at having the dream dashed by a request made too soon.*

He ducked his head, stopping at the water's edge in a mimicry of a memory she'd never had to live through. “Unwittingly, perhaps.”

“You did promise to bring me here in the waking world,” she said, turning around to see the whole of the space. She found she missed the spirits that had danced that night in the Fade, curious and lively until the spell had been broken.

“I did.”

She looked over her shoulder at him, seeing peace on his face like a beacon. Her lips quirked in a lopsided smile. “Not exactly what I have in mind when I think 'may the Dread Wolf take me'.”

He laughed, the one she loved best that ended on a snort. He snagged her by the arm and held her

close, her head automatically tipping back to meet his gaze. He smiled down at her, simple and breathtakingly happy. “What do you think of then?”

She pulled his head down to hers, kissing him hard, nipping his bottom lip with her teeth. “Something else you promised to do here.”

Chapter End Notes

The 'someone' who broke down Flemeth's signature move is Ghil Dirthalen, in her lore video on Thedas magic. So much of this fic would not exist without Ghil Dirthalen.

Okay, right. So before we get much further into this story (hah, little late Lamb) I feel the need to point out that I strongly believe Mythal isn't anywhere near as benevolent as she's portrayed in the game...at least thus far. And I'm aware that isn't saying much. I think Solas learned the hard way on how to manipulate people from her and his agenda may not be his at all, but hers.

That being said...I wanted to keep Twist light. The source material is heavy enough as it is. I did think about adding in a whole subplot that would eventually lead to him having to fight her himself. Frankly, it was more work than I wanted to put in to a fic that's already $\frac{3}{4}$ done. So it isn't here. I'm exploring the idea elsewhere. Cheers!

Do Not Disturb My Waking Dream**

Chapter Notes

9/25/20

Fluff! Smut! Solas's filthy mouth! - a summary

Obviously, this is NSFW.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Solas lay on his back in a bed of something that looked remarkably like clover. It was sweet and cushiony and Carly entertained herself by pushing on the small plants with her hand and watching them spring back into shape. She was sprawled across his chest, her whole body tingling with aftershocks...again. He hadn't shortchanged her on his promise to not let her up until he'd had his fill, and twice already they'd made love here.

“When did it begin?”

“When did what begin?” he returned, almost lazily. She raised herself up enough to see his face, the edges softened with his love for her, and the satisfaction he'd brought to both of them.

“When did you fall in love with me?”

He tucked his hands behind his head to cradle it, stretching out his torso and jostling her around. At first she thought she might get too heavy for him, but he called that nonsense and proved it by having her drape all over him like a blanket. “Hmm.”

She waited patiently, watching the clover stuff bounce and wave. It hurt her neck to try and keep looking up at his face, and she lay her cheek against his wolf leg tattoo, listening to the steady beat of his heart. An old, old song her mother used to sing flitted through her mind, brought on by the trickle of water she could hear and the general ambiance of this secret glade. And she waited.

“I suppose I would say it began by degrees,” he said eventually. “When we left Haven together to close a rift. I overextended myself and you berated me for not eating enough. I should have been angry. What did this mortal, with no magic of her own, know of my struggles? And yet...you did know them. As well as I knew them myself.”

“I was awfully pushy about it, as I recall.”

He chuckled under her, she could feel it vibrate through his chest. “And then you curled into my arms, having overcome your own stubbornness, and you slept so soundly there I did not find you in the Fade. To be offered such trust, when you knew what I was...”

Carly snorted. “Overcoming my stubbornness'. As I remember it, you bullied me into your bedroll.” She lifted her head again to smirk at him. He was smirking back. “Not complaining. Never complaining.”

“There was another moment, when you offered me trust at an unparalleled level. You asked me to help you turn the events of Redcliffe aside.”

“Can you blame me?”

“I cannot. You have always offered your compassion and affection freely, even as aware as you are of what kind of monster I am. How could I not respond in kind?”

Carly pushed herself up until she was sitting...well, straddling. She looked down at him, still calm and unconcerned, hands behind his head. He was the picture of indolent Elvhen decadence, lying naked in a bed of clover. She swatted a hand lightly across his chest, making him jump before he grinned at her.

“You ass. You're not a monster.” She leaned forward to cup his face in her hands. “You're my Rebel Wolf. When did you know, beyond a shadow of any doubt?”

He raised an eyebrow, the look in his eyes playful. “You are full of questions, are you not? Why is that, I wonder.”

“I want to know how your mind works.”

He chuckled again, then suddenly sat up, displacing her enough that she slid into his lap. Her arms went around his neck automatically and she mock glared at him, figuring he'd done it on purpose. He put his hands on her hips, maneuvering her where he wanted her, beginning to rise up under her again. It was her turn to arch a brow at him.

“What more can you possibly need to know about how my mind works, vhenan? You have always been a step ahead of me.”

“Yeah well, I had a cheat sheet.”

“I knew after the fall of Haven,” he said softly. He leaned closer and kissed her once, twice. His hands slid from her hips to clasp behind her back, holding her in place as his lips roved across her jaw and down her neck. “You were so small in my arms, fighting still to carry the world on your shoulders. I knew I would willingly lay down my life for you.”

She finally knew. Knew what the sad look he'd given her was when they reached Skyhold. Those first moments when she realized she couldn't tell him what Skyhold meant to her without giving away her fear that he would someday leave her, as every game version had. He had looked at her with such an expression of sorrow. She remembered thinking that he had something he wanted to say, but wouldn't do it. Now she knew what it was.

“Solas, I love you. I love you so much it should be terrifying.”

“No more than I love you, Carly.” He kissed her hard then, slanting his mouth across hers and drawing her so close she could barely breathe. Not that she minded. She wiggled her hips on him and he pulsed against her center, so hard already. She broke off the kiss to giggle and he took advantage of it to slide into her, making her gasp. The playful air changed in an instant to a consuming desire for *more*.

“Solas...”

“Yes, vhenan?” He pumped into her slowly, mindful that her body didn't have the endurance of his. The slide of heat was so good, hitting every nerve, filling her until she thought she might just fall apart at the seams. She didn't even know where she was going with her thoughts, they were brushed clean out of her mind.

He curled one hand into her hair, tugging it so her head fell back, exposing her throat to his lips and

teeth. The other pressed low on her back, guiding her rise and fall on his cock. It was languorous and gentle, no urgency towards the rougher surge they usually devolved into. He pulled her back further by her hair, his knees bracing her from behind. His lips closed over her breast, sucking her deep into his mouth. The sound she made was guttural and loud, no fear of being overheard in this sacred space.

There was the spark. That first spark that ended with them clawing at each other desperately. It was always a race to see who got there first. But he didn't change the pace or let go of her. He only released one breast to lavish the same attention to the other, his hand still tight in her hair, although it wasn't painful. And she rose and fell on him in a steady rhythm that he was fully in control of. She felt like she was unraveling, her insides coiling like a spring, ready to snap.

He stopped. Carly shuddered on top of him, waiting. Slowly his hand withdrew from her hair and she was able to tip her head forward to meet his eyes, meet the glow banked within them, hiding behind the crafty look he was giving her.

"You're stopping?" she whined breathlessly.

His smirk never failed to make her heart stutter, and this was no different. He slid his cock out of her and pushed her back so he could stand up. She was such a puddle of sensation she barely knew what had happened until he was tugging her hands and bringing her to her feet. He took them both into the pool where the waterfall whispered. A passing thought that it should have been louder flitted in and out of her brain, and then water registered.

"Oh! It's warm."

"Were you expecting otherwise?"

"I mean...we're outside. In the open. I kinda figured...yeah, it would be cold."

"This piece of the network is not in the waking world."

Inherent in that statement was a whole host of things, most importantly that magic was everywhere. It was a malleable, timeless space. She stopped asking questions and let him pull her deeper into the pool. Sweat and mingled fluids sluiced off her body, aided by him cupping handfuls over her shoulders, breasts and back. Each touch lingered, following the flow of the water. She wanted to ask what he was up to, but couldn't find the words. It didn't matter, he could hear it anyway.

"I want to taste you as you come on my tongue," he murmured directly into her ear.

"*Solas!*" she gasped. He'd moved around to stand behind her, his cock digging into her back, just as hard as before. At her outburst, it thumped her, flexing.

When she was as clean as he wanted, he led her back to the patch of clover and laid her down in it. She thought it might tickle or itch, but it was soft and welcoming as a down filled mattress. The sweet scent of it filled the air around them. Of course, then she was distracted from that as he worked his way down her body with teeth and tongue, throwing her leg over his shoulder before he dove between them. The flat of his tongue laid a path along her heat, from entrance to clit and she bucked involuntarily to his amusement.

He murmured Elvish against her, little words of praise and endearment that once she would not have been able to follow, but now understood. *Sweeter than wine, warmer than honey in the sun.* She writhed under his mouth until he held her down with one hand and slid two fingers into her with the other. He curled them and she cried out joyfully, the pressure building so fast she was

blinded by it. He hummed approval into her sensitive folds, vibrating against her clit and she just splintered apart, his name an endless refrain until the pleasure stole her breath. He lapped at her, extending the aftershocks until she was a twitching mess under him. When he leaned back and let her leg fall off his shoulder, he couldn't have looked more self satisfied.

He crawled over her, lining himself up to sink back into her body. "I am not finished with you yet, vhenan."

"You're going to kill me," she panted.

"I can't do that, you are immortal now."

"Solas..." she started, a half-hearted attempt at chastising. Then he filled her and she forgot what she was going to say. He lifted her hips into his, deepening the angle the way he knew she liked it, hitting that spot inside her that made her mindless with need. He drove into her, each thrust bringing her close to the edge again. At this point, she'd lost count of the number of orgasms he'd given her.

"Just think, vhenan," he whispered in her ear. "I could keep you here, forever, *fucking* you into oblivion."

She clenched on him; she couldn't help it. Filth from his mouth was not a thing to take lightly. And oh, he knew it. Retaliation was called for and she dredged up her tattered reserves to rake her nails up his back. His whole body shivered under her hands. "You did say you weren't going to let me up until you'd had your fill."

"I did," he agreed. He lifted her up higher and pressed deep. He stayed there, rocking gently until she convulsed around him. She could feel herself spasming, or maybe that was him. It didn't matter, she fell over the edge and came again on a loud cry. Only then did he follow, spilling into her until it overflowed.

She was a boneless wreck, she could tell. Too weak to do more than lay her hand on the back of his head where he rested on her breasts. She felt a wave pass over her, light and cool, and smiled. Just a touch of healing magic. "Haven't had enough yet?"

He raised himself up, fitting himself against her again. His grin was wicked. "No."

Chapter End Notes

The song that went through her head was Winding Stream (recorded by the Carter Family), a traditional song from which this chapter gets its title.

Taking Leave

Chapter Notes

9/29/20

I'm adding Tevinter Nights spoilers to the tags here.

Cassandra and a measure of Inquisition forces were arrayed, armed and packed up with everything the Seeker would need for a long journey. It was time for her to find the Lord Seeker and what remained of her former order. Now that things had quieted down around Skyhold – and Thedas in general – there was finally time to turn their attention to this piece of the Chantry schism. Cullen had wanted to go with her, but Carly told him no. She knew this was something Cassandra needed to deal with on her own. It still felt very strange to see her off without going with her.

“I know you can handle this, Cassandra. I'm just...”

“It is high time you began to delegate. And this is a Chantry matter that would not fall under your jurisdiction otherwise anyhow. I will not fail you in my duty to represent the Inquisition. And I will send you regular reports of my movements and what information I find. If I should need any further backup...”

“It will be available to you.”

“Inquisitor...Carly. Thank you for doing this for me.”

“I said I would help, I meant it. This is important to you.”

“I am grateful.”

Carly gave her a final long look and then wrapped her in a hug. Cass's face burned bright red, but she didn't push her away. “Go on, get going. I'll look for your return in about a month, but let me know if you're going to be longer than that.”

“Yes, Inquisitor.”

The small army rode out of Skyhold bearing Inquisition banners and Carly felt a swell of pride in the organization she'd built. She leaned against Solas and they watched them until the last ones filed out the huge main gate and onto the narrow bridge leading the pass that would take them down the mountain.

“Now what?” she asked, somewhat rhetorically.

“I must be off myself,” Solas said, right on cue. She had known it wouldn't be long for him to begin his next stage of plans.

“Anywhere you can tell me?”

They went back up into the Great Hall, now mostly empty of courtiers and petitioners alike. Carly had called a break from world leading while she got things finalized between what she still thought

of as DLC's. At this point, she assumed the events of Trespasser had now been altered enough that it wouldn't come about exactly the same way, but the other two would need to be dealt with. She would wait until Cass had returned from dealing with the Lord Seeker. Besides, it was fairly late in the year to start new journeys. Winter was closing fast and with it the passes out of Skyhold would be blocked.

For now, she followed Solas to the rotunda, where he had already finished up several of his murals and had started prepping the next one – her defeat of Corypheus. She sat in his chair while he began to tuck sketchbooks and pencils into a satchel.

“Orlais, I think,” he said, finally answering her question. “Possibly the Free Marches or Tevinter.”

She held herself still. There was only one reason Solas would be going to those places, alone. “This isn't about the Eluvians anymore, is it?”

He paused and gave her a quick look, then went back to his packing. “No, it is not.”

“I'm almost afraid to put my supposition into words.” A mental image formed, clear and *red* and terrifying at a visceral level she couldn't even express. Solas took her hands in his, seeking to calm her anxiety with touch. She allowed herself to be distracted by it, although she could tell her smile was tremulous. “Just be careful, please.”

He kissed her fingertips. “I will, vhenan, as always.”

“I know. So I take it this is going to be the start of elves disappearing from alienages? Slaves suddenly 'escaping', as well as finding...that.”

He gave her a wry look. “Why do I bother to keep things from you?”

She shrugged and stepped closer to him, wrapping her arms around him as she tried to bury her fear under logic and reason. He knew what he was doing, at least...she *hoped* he did. *Enough*, she told herself, *get back on track*. “I don't know, love. I truly don't.”

He leaned down and kissed her, starting out sweet, but letting the heat grow when she answered in kind. When he released her she was breathless, her eyes glazing over. He wore a look of approval. “I should be back in a week or two.”

“So fast?”

“If I am successful, yes.”

“I'll miss you.”

“Anticipation is a spice.”

“Ooh, that's dirty pool.”

He chuckled and tweaked the end of her nose as he finished up his packing. They walked together through the Great Hall to the door of their chambers, nodding greetings along the way to Sera, Thom, Varric and Hawke, who sat by the fire sharing a bottle of something or other as they played cards. Solas set about packing up armor and changes of clothes and she went and stood on the balcony that overlooked the grounds of the keep. It was cool there in the shade. She shivered and wrapped her arms around herself. She heard the final catches of his packs as he finished and waited for him to join her.

"I shall miss you as well," he murmured into her ear. "We will be too often apart now."

"It's good for us to not always be in each other's pockets," she said. His arms came around her and she leaned on him. "Keeps the mystery alive."

"We have little enough of that between us."

"All the more reason. Still, I know I need to get used to it. Sooner or later, the Rebel Wolf will have an actual rebellion to lead. I can't interfere with that."

"So certain?"

"Yes." She huffed under her breath and turned in his arms to meet his eyes. "Let's face it, ma fen. The only thing I'm changing here is the big reveal. I've always known who you are, and what you've got planned."

"That is not entirely true," he contradicted. "You also know that my plans have changed. You are now a part of them. And I no longer intend to bring down the Veil."

"Oh, I don't know about that. I expect that sooner or later you'll have to. It just won't be an end of the world kind of cataclysm, that's all."

"I love you, are you fully aware of that?"

"I am. As I love you. Didn't think I'd get this lucky."

"What has luck to do with it?"

"Well, if this was the game, by now you'd be long gone, disappeared without a trace. So far hidden Leliana's numerous spies couldn't find you. I'd be left with a bare face and no answers. And it would go on a long time before I found you again, and then you'd break my heart all over again. I've skipped all of that for the truth at the outset. What is that if not luck?"

"Fate perhaps. You do not know how you arrived in this world, but surely it was for a reason."

"Bah, now you sound like Flemythal." He made a face at her irreverence that made her laugh. She was pretty sure she knew what her reason for being there was, speaking of the goddess. And she'd accomplished it. So far. "I'll see that reason through. I fully intend to get my happily ever after."

"And what would that entail?" He was holding her closer now, and she twined her arms around his neck.

"You." He gathered her close, kissing her again. When he released her she took a shaky breath and met his eyes. "Solas...if it's not in Tevinter, then it's in Nevarra."

"Nevarra?" He seemed surprised. "You know this?"

"It moves around a lot, it's changed hands several times since Kirkwall. Mostly Tevinter hands, but they move around a lot too. I know at some point the Mortalitasi were or are involved. I just don't know *when* precisely. Don't waste your time looking into it in Orlais, it's not there." She realized her fingers had curled into his sweater, clenching into fists. She made an effort to let go as he watched her, processing something she couldn't quite name. She wondered if he also saw the knowledge in the back of her mind of what he would do to the Mortalitasi and Tevinter mages when he found them.

“You fear this object, far more than you fear anything else in this world. Why?”

“Because I know what it's capable of. Do you really need it?” *Explosions, the very stones coming to life, madness and blood. Screaming and chaos. Unbridled power and all it costs is one's soul.*

“I do.” He tapped the end of her nose. “But not for the reason you are thinking of.”

“Oh?”

He smirked at her. “No. And I will not be bringing it here should I obtain it.”

“That's a relief.”

“That being said...I will need a space soon, for study. Somewhere private and reasonably well protected.”

“There's that library room in the basement of the main hall.”

He smiled at her ready answer. “That will do.”

“I'll work on cleaning it up then, while you're gone.”

“Thank you, vhenan.” He kissed her forehead and went back into their chamber to gather up his packs. “And now I will take my leave. I will see you soon.”

“Dareth shiral, ma fen. Ar lath ma.”

He pressed a final kiss to her lips. “And I you.”

She stayed on the balcony until she saw his long, confident stride go out of the castle gate, her arms hugged around herself. Her mind raced with questions. The timeline was wrong, for one thing. For another, he was leaving on foot and not by Eluvian, which meant wherever he was headed first was either nearby or he had another mirror stashed somewhere she didn't know about, which was entirely likely. And following on the heels of that thought, and most disturbing to her peace of mind, his intent was completely unknown to her for the first time since she'd set foot in Thedas. She tried hard not to be troubled by it, tried to convince herself that soon enough everything would be this way. Her store of foreknowledge was running dry.

It didn't help.

A Shadow of Doubt

Chapter Notes

10/2/20

What...you didn't think the Nightmare had been forgotten, did you?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The nightmares began the first night he was gone, and Carly woke – gasping for breath, a cold sweat running down her back – without remembering them. Which in itself was an oddity, considering her ability to shape the Fade was strong, although untutored. It shouldn't happen without her control either way.

For a few days, she tried to convince herself that it was just because she was worried. For the first time she didn't know what was happening, and while she knew that time would come, she hadn't expected it to be so soon. And on top of it was her worry about what Solas was hunting for. She hadn't even breathed a word to Varric and Hawke that the idol still existed. She knew that wouldn't help anyone.

In any event, however, the nightmares continued unabated. With each night, they grew clearer. And she could recall them upon waking.

They were memories, she recognized that much.

But they were not hers.

“Now is the hour of our victory,” Corypheus's voice crept through her sleeping mind. She tried to push it away, knowing full well that he was gone, dead. Well, what passed for dead in the Fade. The perspective of the dream shifted, and she was the figure held by Warden magic. She stared defiantly into the face of the Magister as he approached, his features even more bent and warped, the orb in his hand hazy as if it was nothing more than a badly rendered image overlapped by another. *“Keep the sacrifice still.”*

“You're dead,” she cried, but it sounded muffled. Something was preventing her from changing the surroundings, from stepping away from the dream. Her gaze moved frantically around the edges of the vision, hoping to find a spirit, even a wisp. There was nothing but a choking darkness, a weight pressing on her from all sides. She shouted again, mimicking the words Divine Justinia had called out before she herself had arrived in Thedas. “Someone, help me!”

“There is no escape for you, little fly.” It was not a voice she knew right away, although she had her suspicions. She waited to see if the image of the Lavellan she replaced would burst through the doors, whether she, hanging in Justinia's place, would be able to kick the orb from Corypheus's hand, bestowing the Anchor on...

Wait, why was she seeing this from Justinia's perspective?

“No escape,” the Nightmare said, sweeping her away from the memory to the next one. Now she

was Lavellan again, climbing up a steep slope barely cut with handholds, growing no closer to the Divine's outstretched hands as demon spiders chittered behind her, chasing her. There was laughter under the sound of their pincers on the stones. It was a hungry laugh.

“What do you get from this?” she snarled from between clenched teeth, knowing in her conscious mind that she had not lived this, had not had to escape from this. She also knew, with a sorrowed pang, that the other Lavellan had not managed it and she had taken that person's place.

“*Your fear, little fly,*” the Nightmare replied, as if it made perfect sense. Like it was a reasonable and normal exchange. It was chilling. “*Terror and doubt, growing like a pearl in your heart, shadowing every step and decision.*”

Carly turned, flexing her hand bearing the Anchor towards the encroaching demons. Lesser fears, small terrors. To most they looked like spiders, but she remembered fleetingly that to Cassandra they looked like maggots. They fled from the light of the mark, their skittering sounds more like wails now. “You will not have me, demon!”

The Nightmare laughed and the stone she clung to abruptly disappeared, causing her to free fall.

She landed back where she'd begun, hanging motionless in Justinia's place as Corypheus sought to drain her life's blood to open the orb. She struggled, but to no avail. Again and again the memories played out, unwavering and unchanging, always ending before she could see the person they belonged to.

“*Survive the first thirty heartbeats and you have already won,*” Solas's smooth voice said in her own memory. “*If you focus on defending yourself, you will see the full range of their abilities in the first thirty heartbeats.*”

He had been speaking to Thom of demons and fighting them, of course, but almost all demons had an initial spirit at their core. The tactic should remain viable regardless. This loop was too regular, too precise without her being able to change it or affect it in any way. *The first thirty heartbeats.*

“Are you a spirit?” she called as she fell once again from stones suddenly gone like dust under her fingers. She guessed the loop of recollection she was trapped in was not the Nightmare itself, but another being used as a tool against her. The wisps she'd never found when she was in the Fade physically, because she hadn't stayed. “You formed from the Lavellan who died, right? The Nightmare demon has twisted your purpose! You don't have to do this!”

There was no answer, but the oppressive feeling of the demon bore down on her, feeding pain into the dream. She screamed and the cycle began anew. But she knew what she faced. The Nightmare demon was pushing stronger against her now that she'd figured it out, it was its only weapon against her.

Time had no meaning in the Fade, of this she was aware. But she was getting weaker. Pain, even the ephemeral kind of a dream, was exhausting. She stopped fighting the loop, knowing that was not what she needed to focus on. Again and again she hung in the bonds of Warden magic, then climbed a cliff to where Justinia always waited but could never quite reach her grasping fingers. Solas's advice to Thom about finding a weak spot in a demon didn't have any bearing when she didn't actually want to hurt the spirit whose purpose she was trapped in. The Nightmare was her real foe. And all she had was her wits.

“What do you *get* out of this, demon?” she asked again, harder, forcing steel into her voice since she had none in her hand.

“You will relive these moments until you are mine, little fly. Until you doubt. Until you go mad. Until you die.”

She laughed, an ugly, dark thing that erupted from her throat with the memory now of words she'd heard the Nightmare use. “Tell me something, demon. Ar dar'lasa Fen'Harel enansal. What do you think will happen to you if you hurt me? You won't survive his wrath.”

As if she'd conjured him – and maybe she had, who knew how this shit worked? – a feeling of warmth filled her, pushing back the Nightmare's hold on her. She couldn't see them, but she could feel six eyes looking down on the scene from on high, impossibly huge and distant. Yet as present as if he stood next to her. There was a feeling like being enclosed in the sweep of wings, vast and unending in the malleable space. She *knew* it should be frightening – Solas wasn't called the Roamer of the Beyond and Bringer of Nightmares for no reason – but to her it was a comfort. A spark grew in front of her eyes. It was spreading, growing brighter until it was blinding. She flinched from it, wondering if he would appear in the center of it. It began to coalesce into a form, but it was not Solas's.

“Cole?”

She dropped from the dream, landing on the ground with a thud as Cole stood between her and the demon. He cupped something in his hands, was speaking to it. She inched forward until she could hear him.

“Wounded, wandering. You do not belong here, your purpose wasted. Falling, fluttering, like feathers of fire burning off into stone. You formed from anguish and fear. I can free you. I can help.”

She was able to stand and saw the small spirit cupped in Cole's hands like a lightning bug. It glowed with a sickly green pulse, just like the memories she would have retrieved from wisps if she really had been the one who had fallen through the rift into the Fade after Corypheus's botched ritual.

“A spirit of memory?” she asked softly, realizing even as she spoke that that was redundant. Spirits *were* memories, it's how they formed. She also realized that they no longer stood in the Nightmare's realm. Whatever Solas or Cole had done had banished the demon from her mind. “What happened to it?”

“The fear of the Nightmare twisted it. Turned it to doubt.”

“A demon of doubt. But it couldn't affect me fully because I'm not that Lavellan?”

“Yes.”

“Is it all right?”

“No. It is weak and tired, a shredded shade of a soul that no longer speaks. I can end its pain.”

“Do it, Cole. Set it free.”

He seemed to inhale the glowing spirit. When he released his breath, a thread of golden light trickled from his mouth to reform into a ball no bigger than the head of a dandelion. It hung in the air, as if it was unsure what to do now. Carly could sympathize.

“Now what?”

Cole turned to her, his blue eyes blazing in the Fade light. When he spoke, it was with Solas's voice. "Wake up."

Carly shot straight into a seated position in the empty bed, drawing the covers up to her chin when she saw Cole was sitting on the end of it, his face hidden entirely by his hat. She'd worn one of Solas's shirts to sleep in since sleeping without him had been so awful. It had helped a little, surrounded by his scent as if he was holding her. Pity it hadn't kept the nightmares at bay the way she hoped, but it seemed she'd managed to do that on her own anyhow. Well, Cole had.

"Keeper Istimaethorial said they'd sent their First to the Conclave," she said when her breath had settled back to normal. "That means it was a mage. Could you find a name?"

"Is it important?"

"If we know, I can send word to the clan that the spirit rests. It's a comfort to have closure."

"Her name was Ellana," Cole said after a moment. Carly nearly snorted. She should have guessed.

"Thank you, Cole."

"Carly..."

"Yes, sweetie?"

"Did I help?"

"Yes, you did. You didn't just save me, you saved that spirit too. Now it's free from the Nightmare and can be true to its purpose."

"It was so afraid."

"So was I."

The hat tilted, as if he was looking at her from under it. "The Nightmare wanted you to doubt. Why?"

"Revenge, I would say. For killing Corypheus and stopping a lot of the chaos that fed it. It wanted me to second guess myself. So I'd make mistakes that could be fatal to us all and start feeding it again. With Corypheus dead, it must be starving and desperate. Thanks to you, now it can't do that."

"And Solas."

She let herself laugh a little. "Well, Fen'Harel has a stronger grip on the Fade than any measly nightmare. Of *that* I certainly have no doubts."

"Ma dar'lasa dhruan'en," he intoned in the dreamy way he had when he was channeling someone else's thoughts.

She smiled. "Yes, I have faith in him."

"This is home, lathanor, the place of his love. Burdens shared, guilt forgiven, love freely exchanged. You are important to him. Carly...vhenan, emma sa'lath bellanaris, ar ama dhrua'ma. It is a blessing unlooked for and treasured."

“Is he...?”

“I will find my home soon, rest my head without care, walk in the world made real. Ma emma atish'an, tas revas. Bellana.”

Cole left like smoke before she could ask him to clarify. Not that she expected Cole could really do that, it wasn't precisely his nature. Still...she felt better. Battling one's demons shouldn't be so literal, but there was no one else she trusted to keep her safe as much as Solas. And soon enough he would be home. It was enough to know that. She settled back into the covers, keeping the light linen shirt around her, and she slept, blessedly peaceful at last.

Chapter End Notes

Ar dar'lasa Fen'Harel enansal – I have the blessing of Fen'Harel.

Ma dar'lasa dhruan'en – You have/place faith in him.

Vhenan, emma sa'lath bellanaris, ar ama dhrua'ma – My heart, my one eternal love, I will keep/freely accept your faith in me.

Ma emma atish'an, tas revas. Bellana – You are my place of peace, as well as freedom. Forever.

Courtesy of Fenxshiral's Project Elvhen.

Faith, In All Its Forms

Chapter Notes

10/6/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She had had notes from both Cassandra and Solas. In the time they had been gone, reports had been frequent. Cassandra's showed a growing sense of unease and distraction and anger. Solas's were mostly dry recountings of his travels, his feelings on the Mortalitasi and his intention to head towards Tevinter. He thanked her for her advice to skip Orlais, learning from his agents that what she'd said was true, the idol purported there was fake and would have cost him precious time.

He made no mention of the battle in the Fade, but then again, she hadn't expected him to in a letter. Her sleep had been undisturbed by any dreams since that night and she wondered if he was warding her against them, even though that meant he could not visit her there either. Cole had conveyed that he would soon be home. She could be patient.

Cassandra was due back in Skyhold now, her mission completed. She and her party had met with – and defeated – Lord Seeker Lucius along the way, and Carly knew the crisis of faith Cass was going to have upon her return. She had to be ready for it.

They rode through the gates of Skyhold and Cass looked around immediately for Carly, probably guessing she would be there to see them come in. The Seeker's eyes were hard, her face haggard. The troop of soldiers around her showed no sign of fatigue or worry, and few injuries among them. Carly tilted her head at the Herald's Rest and Cass nodded.

She joined her a little while later, sitting down across from her, a book in her hands that Carly recognized instantly. The journal of the Lord Seekers. She pushed a glass of wine across the table to her friend. She took in the bleakness of the Seeker's expression. "All right, lay it on me."

Cassandra took a sip and held it for a moment before she started. When she placed the glass back down and looked at Carly, her face was softer, although it took some effort. "I wish I could be angry at you, for knowing what I would find and not telling me. It would have been easier for me to find another target for my..." She sighed, seemingly at a loss for words. "You know me well, it seems. I would not have listened." She tapped the cover of the book. "Do you know what this is?"

"Yes, I do."

"In all the years I spent with the Seekers, I thought we sought righteousness. I thought the Circles of Magi were a safe haven for mages, that the Templars were a necessary defense against them. So much of it was a lie."

"Not a lie, Cassandra. A truth that had...evolved."

Cassandra frowned. "You mean it has become corrupted. The abuse of power is reprehensible. I cannot in good faith continue to call myself a Seeker of Truth. They are monstrous." She met Carly's eyes fully, her face twisted still. "I am a monster."

“No, you are not. The fact that you see the things you've learned as being wrong shows that you are not a monster. You can rebuild the Seekers to what they should be, you know. Take this knowledge you've found and turn it to a good purpose.”

“Do you know what will happen when the remaining mages discover that we've always known how to reverse Tranquility?”

“I can guess.”

“And they would be right for their ire. I saw the rebellion and dissolution of the Circles as such a sudden thing, but it was doomed to happen sooner or later, I think.” She shook her head and twirled the wineglass by its stem. “They were right to rebel against such injustice. I understand Solas better now.”

Carly tilted her head at the Seeker. “How do you mean?”

“When you first told me of his past, that he was Fen'Harel, a god of myth and legend, I was angry. I felt betrayed by a friend. We spoke of it.”

“You did?”

“Of course,” Cass laughed. “Did you not expect me to confront him?”

“I suppose I should have thought you would,” she said with a laugh of her own. “You're very...”

“Brash, is the word you're looking for.”

“No, it isn't. Okay...maybe it is.”

Cassandra spared her a smile before she continued with a sigh. “We spoke. I always saw something in him that was sad, I suppose. That he looked upon this world and it *hurt* him. I never understood why until after. You told me he created the Veil, that he locked away the Dalish gods because they would destroy the world. *He* told me that he was looking to redress old wrongs. He told me that you have convinced him not to go ahead with his plans, that this world is worth preserving if he can. We have suffered for past mistakes, bled for them. He has too.”

“Yes.”

“Solas and I have great respect for each other, even though our start was...” She shook her head impatiently as she trailed off.

“You had no reason to think he was anything other than what he said. I mean, that was how he wanted it. He can be infuriatingly clever and secretive along with his stubbornness. All of this has only worked out the way it has because I knew that about him.”

Cass chuckled. “That is why you are here. You want to help him right these transgressions, even if it means disrupting the fragile peace we have achieved.”

Carly nodded. “I knew when I arrived here how this would end and what I wanted to change in it. His intentions are motivated by the greater good, Cassandra, but don't ever doubt that his plans weren't at one time monstrous. I didn't want him to unmake the world for an ideal.”

“I know. He told me that taking down the Veil without preparation for the mortal world would have most likely destroyed it. That now he is planning another way.”

“Where are you going with this?”

“Speaking with him gives me hope.” She laid her hands flat on the journal of the Seekers. “Hope that I can do better too.”

“What are you thinking of doing?”

“I do not know precisely.” She stood up and paced between the tables with her frustration. Carly had found a quiet corner of the Rest for this talk, knowing that at some point, the Seeker would need to work off her own frustrated energy. “I cannot find the Maker's will in all of this. You are from another world where all of this has played out already. *Is* there even a Maker?”

Carly immediately thought of the theory that Solas *was* the Maker, since he had actually made the world what it was now, but decided that would just be too much for an already dumbfounded and in crisis Seeker. “I can't answer that for you, Cassandra. There is no confirmation or denial either way.”

“What do you believe?”

“You ask *me* that? My lover is an ancient Elvhen god who swears blind that he isn't.” She laughed. “I think we make our own gods. They are a convenient way to explain the world and give us the answers we know we have but can't unlock without faith.”

Cass snorted derisively. “Faith. It means little.”

“For some it can lead them astray, so certain in their own belief that they know the will of their gods that they won't listen to anyone else. That's how Corypheus happened. For others, it is a guiding principle, something to give them a moral backbone to do the right thing, regardless of how it's perceived at the time. That would be you, in case it's not clear enough. Cassandra Pentaghast, I meant what I said. You have the power now to rebuild the Seekers into an organization to be proud of again. You have the key to make this right.”

“Do I? I do not know that I am strong enough.”

“For what it's worth, I know that you are. I may not believe in the Maker, but I believe in you.”

Cass stopped her pacing and sat down again. She held the journal in her hands, a mix of reverence and disgust on her face. “Every Lord Seeker from the time of the first Inquisition hid the knowledge they had. It's appalling. I will not hide this. I will not cower behind the shadow of tradition. I cannot.” She took a deep breath. “If I choose to do this thing, I will need your help. Your support.”

“You have it. Unequivocally.” She reached across the table and took Cassandra's hands in her own. After a moment, Cass gripped them back.

“Thank you.”

Carly woke from sleep to the distinctive sound of armor clinking and shifting. It was still gloomy and dark in the chamber, but she could see the outline of a familiar profile on the edge of the bed. She tucked the pillow more firmly under her head to raise it up but didn't roll over, keeping her arms tucked close to her sides.

The shape moved and she felt a soft touch run along her spine, tracing the bones, before laying flat

on the small of it. The hand was clothed fully in chainmail, it rasped on the material of her sleeping shirt. She smiled into the gloom, wondering if he could see it.

“Hello, ma fen.”

“Hello, vhenan. Are you wearing one of my shirts?”

“Did you send Cole to me to escape the Nightmare demon?” she countered.

“I did.” She could hear the smile in his voice. “It will not trouble you again. I have...taken care of it.”

“I'm not sure I want to ask.” She did anyway. “Did you kill it?”

“Not entirely. Thinking minds will always create horrors to plague their dreaming. But the creature who fed upon the terrors of countless mortals is gone. I have absorbed its strength, reducing it to nothing more than it should ever have been.”

A wolf devouring a spider, she thought. *Crunch crunch*. He huffed a small sound, dipping as always.

“That's good,” she said aloud. She shifted around against the pillow, still trying to get a good look at him without actually putting in the effort to sit up. “Are you wearing god armor?”

He chuckled, soft and heartily amused. The hand on her back flexed. “Perhaps.”

She stretched out her arm then, reaching up to feel the fur of the wolf pelt she expected to find. It was plush and deep and she used her grip on it to lever herself up until she was kneeling on the bed. The shadows didn't detract from the angled lines of his armor, and it gleamed in places even without the light. *This* was worth getting up for. She had no trouble closing the distance between them to straddle his lap, the smooth, cold plates against her bare legs making her shiver. His hands came around her to hold her steady and his head tilted to meet her kiss.

“Welcome home.”

Chapter End Notes

AAAAHHHH!!! I'm so excited. The next arc is a trio of my very favorite chapters for this fic. I cannot wait to share with you all.

A Working Vacation

Chapter Notes

10/9/20

squees and does happy dance

I'm so excited.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Frostback Basin was lush and fragrant. Like a jungle. It was hard to believe that not too far from where she stood at the research outpost there was a wall of ice so magically enhanced nothing could dispel it. As well as an elven Inquisitor who'd frozen himself in time while holding onto a dragon. Sorrow already tugged at her heart at the prospect of finding him.

She brushed that aside however, to greet Scout Harding with a hug. "It's good to see you in one piece."

"Thank you, Inquisitor."

"Your parents are still safe in Denerim?"

"Yes, although they want to come to Skyhold now that everything seems more settled."

"They should." Carly stepped back and resumed her 'official' Inquisitor expression. "All right, lay it on me."

"Scouts have picked up signs of hostile Avvar everywhere. They call themselves the Jaws of Hakkon, whatever that means. The river is swarmed and trading sites have been targeted. Getting information from the farthest camps has been impossible." Harding looked around Carly to see the stream of soldiers and members of the Inner Circle still filing into the research outpost. "I see you brought a crowd."

"Time to delegate. Bull and Thom will take some soldiers with them to the river and clean that up. Cassandra and the rest will spread out behind them and make sure all the camps are stocked and safe. I've got some rifts to deal with and a *friendly* Avvar clan to find. Dorian and Varric will stay here and give Professor Kenric a hand at deciphering what information we've got on Ameridan."

"Sounds good, your Worship. Watch yourself out there, this place might look pretty, but it's got teeth."

"I don't doubt it. I'll check in regularly, but don't expect me back for a while."

"You got it, your Worship."

There were few she would admit it to – and two of them were with her – but Carly loved the Avvar. Well, she at least loved those of Stone-Bear Hold. She loved their pragmatic approach to life, their

fierce independence, their complex relationships with spirits and their love for their traditions and each other. She stood stock still in the Augur's hut and let the spirits assembled float around her, their whispers filling her ears as she smiled with her eyes closed. Gentle brushes like the softest breeze wafted over her, around her. The Augur barked a laugh.

"You are not what I expected, lowlander."

She smiled wider without opening her eyes just yet. "I get that *so* often."

Solas snorted from where he stood across from the blue fire from her.

"Hello," Cole said in a dreamy voice to the gathered spirits. "They are happy to see you."

"What's this one then?" the Augur asked sharply.

"I am Compassion," Cole replied.

"You walk freely among these folk?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm here to help."

"As compassion does." The Augur made a gesture of respect. "I greet you, worthy one." Carly looked between the pair as they spoke and was glad she'd brought Cole along where he was openly welcome. The Augur turned back to her, his eyes boring into hers from behind his headdress. "The gods tell me you have traveled far, lowlander. Farther than feet can carry."

"They are right."

"You blaze like the sun, and you have mended the sky. The gods tell me strange tales of your doings. Great deeds and small, and respect for their kind above all. They watch out for you."

"I'm glad to hear it."

She thought she spotted an echoing smile to her own. Hard to tell with how sternly he held his face. "You've no need of my guidance, have you?"

"Not really. I still wanted to greet you and be introduced to your local spirits, though. It's only polite."

"And it is appreciated. Not many lowlanders show such honor. You are welcome to Stone-Bear Hold. The Thane has given you guest-welcome, and I'm certain we will see more of you."

"I'm sure you will."

Carly had come prepared, knowing she'd have to earn the Hold's friendship before they would break their treaty with the Jaws of Hakkon. She hunted for a son to keep his father's name, rescued Storracker, sparred well in their arena, persuaded the Augur's apprentice to come home and received the blessing of a spirit after a hunt.

And now, after all that, she was allowed the use of a boat to carry her to the island where she knew she would find the remains of Telana. She laughed at both Solas and Cole as they watched her pull the oars herself with something like awe, neither of them having the faintest idea how to do it themselves.

"Never send a pair of elgar'venathe to do a woman's job," she quipped as the boat scuffed up against the short dock.

“She doesn't mean it,” Cole said to Solas, who smiled gently.

“I know, Cole. She is teasing us.”

Gravel crunched beneath their feet as they climbed up the hill to the ramshackle cottage where the rift remained, holding the spirit drawn so long ago to the dying Dreamer. Already its voice whispered to her, a repeating litany of confusion and grief. Carly didn't hesitate once they reached the ancient remains of the house, she lifted her hand and reversed the rift, opening it for the spirit.

“Telana slept. I slept. To find him in dreaming. But I...the blood...I've...*she's* gone. Telana wanted to reach Ameridan again. One more time, but she couldn't. I couldn't. She died.”

“I know,” Carly offered softly. The swirl of the Veil created a circle of green light. She stepped into it, careful not to disturb the bones lying in the center where the spirit hung over them. “It's all right.”

“They fought at the shore. Spirits and magic. Cold, so cold. It's how I found her. How she found us. They rested here, then went up the river. Metal spikes. A way to stop the dragon.”

Carly held up her hands as if she was soothing a wild animal. It was a pity spirits were too formless to touch, to comfort, she lamented. “Hey, hey, I know. I already know. I just wanted to set you free.”

“Forever waiting. Dreaming. Then...dead.”

“She rests now, and she is not forgotten. We won't forget either. Her memory lives as long as you do. We'll find Ameridan. You don't have to wait here anymore.”

“Thank you,” the spirit said, gratitude plain in the voice. “It was hard. I...*she*...went a long time ago. I stayed because she asked. Her things are there. She wanted them found.”

Carly knelt over the bones, laid out so perfect and peaceful. She lifted the bow, still pristine after so many centuries, protected and preserved by the spirit. It felt good in her hands. She looked up to the spirit, feeling the draw on the Anchor to close the rift. She whispered, “Dareth shiral.”

The swirling glow extinguished and the spirit was gone. Carly stayed on her knees, knowing there would be kickback as the Anchor absorbed the magic from the small rune tucked into the satchel with the Inquisition orders. She grunted as it made her hand flare with pain. Solas was at her side in a second, cradling her hand in his.

“Every day you surprise me, vhenan,” he said. He brushed the tears from her cheeks that she didn't even know she'd been shedding, and helped her back to her feet. “It is time for us to depart, I think.”

Back at Stone-Bear Hold, Carly went to talk with Svarah Sun-Hair. The Thane looked troubled by events, but happy to see her. “Have you found a way through the wall of ice around the Hakkonites old fortress?”

“Yes. There was something else I wanted to tell you though. The Jaws of Hakkon bound their god into mortal form, right? Hundreds of years ago?”

“What of it?”

“We've learned that Inquisitor Ameridan came here 800 years ago to fight a great dragon. One that came from the mountains with Avvar warriors to attack the lowlands.”

“He must have fought well to stop Hakkon himself,” Svarah laughed.

“You're okay with us defeating this dragon?”

“Hakkon cannot be reborn if he is not defeated. He needs a good rebirthing.”

“That he does,” Carly said, satisfied. “I'll let you know when we're ready.”

High up in the trees of an Inquisition camp, she looked over a map of the area, plotting the fastest way to get to the Tevinter fortress where Ameridan and Telana's shrine was hidden. As well as the dragon spikes that would shunt the magic to melt the ice. Solas stood at her side, looking over her shoulder.

“You seem very happy here, vhenan,” he said suddenly.

“I love it here, even with all the damned critters. This?” she waved a hand around to encompass their surroundings. “This is a vacation compared to rest of Thedas. The Avvar are what I wish the rest of the humans could be like when it comes to spirits.”

“Yes, their relationships do seem...mutually beneficial. It is a great pity more humans do not think as they do, even if some of their rituals are baffling.”

“What's baffling about living in harmony with your environment? Or do you see them as savage as the rest of humanity does?” She gave him an arch look.

“It is not that. And humans are not the only race to practice such savagery. Before Arlathan, elves lived much this way too.”

“I think what baffles you is how their relationships work in spite of the Veil. Early elves had no need to draw spirits close with offerings and agreements, the spirits were just there. The Veil complicates things now.”

“I suppose you are correct. I had not fully considered that.”

She smirked at him. “Of course not.” She leaned into him and nudged him with her nose, her face wry. “I'm telling you, ma fen. Terminal male superiority will get you every time. There's a reason the saying 'pride goeth before the fall' exists.”

He snorted, not nearly as offended as she feared. “And now I have been put neatly in my place?”

“Something like that.” She kissed his chin and went back to the map.

“Are you looking for something specific here?” He gestured at the table.

“The best route to Razikale's Reach. Normally, we'd have to come up through the old drains. Poison spiders,” she shuddered. “I'm just looking to see if there's another route. From there, it will be a cross country haul to activate all the spires and melt the ice where the Hakkonites are.”

“Is that why you brought Lasylin?” *He Is Like Wind*, the name she'd finally chosen for her hart.

“Yes,” she nodded. “He's fleet footed and large enough that he faces little danger from attack, even from gurguts. And he'll carry both of us if I give him enough salt.”

“You spoil him.”

“He's worth it.”

Solas shook his head at her, then pressed a kiss to her hair. “I shall make sure we have enough to spare, then.”

“See, you're just as bad.” She worked out her route as he wandered off, chuckling.

Every Mother Finds Druffalo Among Sleeping Juniper Groves, she thought with a smile, picturing the statue of Andraste with Ghilan'nain's halla in her hands.

“*Oh, I suppose I forgot Fen'Harel*,” Kenric would say when she told him his mnemonic sentence was incomplete.

“Most people do,” Carly murmured aloud.

Chapter End Notes

Elgar'venathe – 'spirits who walk', a term for spirits who have taken on a physical body, many thanks to queenofkadara for gracious permission to borrow the word.

Yes...Since You Asked**

Chapter Notes

10/13/20

Be advised, this is rougher than normal, lots of biting and a fair amount of unspoken but consensual aggression.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Their plans were set. They would assault the fortress under cover of darkness and finish the Hakkonites. Until then, Carly put together armor for her and Solas to combat the chill she knew they would find. She wasn't sure where he'd gone off to, probably still hanging out with the spirits at the Augur's hut. So she was startled when he came into their little guest house while she was working on the base layer of thick Avvar paint on her arms in only her smallclothes. She'd already done her legs and they were nearly dry.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Getting ready for tonight.”

“With paint?”

She made an affirmative noise and swept another stripe across her arm. “It's for the cold. You're going to want a layer of it too, unless you're just going to keep up a barrier the whole time.”

He let out a breathy sort of sound that she wasn't expecting. She looked over her shoulder to see him staring at her bare back. His eyes shifted to take in her painted legs and arms and then again to her back. *Okay, Bull, you were right*, she thought. Solas's eyes were locked onto the expanse of skin visible, while seeming to be additionally enthralled with the swathes of paint on her skin. She raised an eyebrow at him.

“See something you like, ma fen?” she purred.

“What?” Abruptly his face changed, his eyes snapping to hers as he tried to hide his expression behind the smooth mask he used most of the time.

She laughed and put down her brush, but she didn't turn around. Over the year or so of living in Thedas, her body had changed, growing hard with muscle. She was proud of how strong she was now. What hadn't clicked completely for her was that she *knew* that Solas liked muscles. His flirt to a warrior Lavellan was evidence enough of that. But he didn't usually get such a show from her. She flexed to exaggerate her arms and shoulders and subtly planted her legs more firmly while she wiped her hands clean and heard the almost involuntary intake of breath behind her. She smiled to herself. Why hadn't she thought of this before?

There was a whisper of sound as he crossed their guest hut before his fingers lit on her skin, tracing the bunches and grooves of muscle across her shoulder blades. She leaned into the touch just slightly and shivered when his breath hit her ear.

“How much paint are you planning on wearing?” he asked, a soft whisper that tickled the stray

hairs escaping from her messy scraped up bun.

"I'll need it on my extremities for sure," she whispered back, rapidly losing her train of thought as his fingers glided across her skin, down her spine and around her ribs. "Probably should have it on my torso too, for...ahh...extra protection..."

His hands had stolen around her and now lifted to cup her breasts, thumbs lightly skimming across her nipples. He hummed in her ear. "Go on."

"You wouldn't...wouldn't want me to get frostbite...anywhere...would you?"

"Indeed not," he agreed, tracing a fine line of nips along the back of her neck. She didn't bother to stop the shivers that racked her between his voice and his hands on her. Desire for him had begun the instant he touched her, and now she was weak with it. He must have known and shifted her forwards with a bump from his hip so she leaned against the table that held all her paint. He was already rock hard behind her, not that she was in any way surprised at that. For such a disciplined man, it was shocking how easy it was for him to become so provoked.

"Solas..."

"Yes, vhenan?" he murmured, continuing his line of tiny bites to her other shoulder. His hands, meanwhile, were pushing her smalls off her hips to drop at her feet. She sucked in a breath as his fingers traced patterns low on her belly, inching ever closer to her center. "Is something the matter?"

"Just fucking touch me already," she whined. He chuckled behind her.

"Make me," he growled into her ear. Her knees literally shook and she had to lean more heavily on the table for a moment. When she had her breath back, she grabbed his wrist and shoved his hand between her legs. His fingers spread out between her folds, smoothing up the slick gathered there with a soft breath of surprise. "You are already wet."

Thank you for stating the obvious, she thought and he huffed into her hair with amusement. He teased her, avoiding the place that she wanted him most to touch and she wriggled in the cage of his body and the table.

"Make me," he said again, just as quiet as before.

It was a game of wills, she realized. It usually was with him. She grinned in spite of her aching frustration and reached behind her to cup his erection through his breeches, her palm sliding along the patched material with surety. Her reward was a groan in her ear. She tightened her grip enough to feel the outline of his cock in her hand, as if she could reach through his clothes and circle her hand around him and he bit the side of her neck. And still he teased her, his touch light and slow, making her want to buck into him.

"Get naked, ma fen," she commanded. His hand left her and he stepped back. When she whirled around to glare at him, he was giving her such a supremely smug look she nearly wanted to hit him.

His head tilted to the side in that unnatural way he had and his expression could not more clearly say what he'd been taunting her with for the last few minutes if it tried. *Make me*.

She tore at the belt he wore over his sweater, tugging that away too once she could. He didn't exactly hinder her aggressive stripping of him, but he wasn't really helping either. His hands roved over her skin, dipping into the wet paint on her arm and spreading it across her breasts. She might have tugged on the laces of his undershirt too hard and he jerked to keep his balance, a sardonic

brow raised at her even as his eyes lit up. This was a side of him she'd never gotten to see before. It was infuriating even as it was arousing.

She shoved the undershirt off his shoulders, yanking it off his arms while he stood there looking at her with that damned hot expression and she shoved him backwards until he hit the wall of the hut. He grunted as his back hit the wall, but it was a good sound. She didn't care about the paint she'd already applied as she tugged his head down to hers to kiss him. She wrapped one of her legs around his, hitching herself onto his thigh.

His arms banded around her as they bit and licked at each other's mouths. Then they dropped to her backside, holding her closer still so she could feel the seams of the patches on his breeches against her. She moaned into his mouth, turning it to a growl as he lifted her away from the sensation, his hands cupping her ass to support her weight.

“You got me this worked up, Fen'Harel, you better deliver.”

“Or what, vhenan?” he asked, not at all innocently. His hands flexed on her ass, spreading her open. She needed him inside her in the worst way. She curled into him and bit his chest over one of his tattoos.

“I will beat the snot out of you,” she swore when she let him go. The gasp he'd made was almost worth all this frustration. She curled around to the other side and bit that tattoo as well, feeling the vibration of his groan against her lips. His hands tightened on her backside almost painfully, the tips of his long fingers nearly brushing her heat. “Solas...please.”

He let her drop back onto the floor and cupped her face in his hand, kissing her so deeply she forgot what she was begging for. He stole her breath, drew her tongue into his mouth and bit it gently. Her hands had a mind of their own and scrabbled at the laces of his breeches, desperate to feel him in her hands. The laces gave and his cock sprang up against her belly. She wrapped her fingers around it to stroke its length. And still he was kissing her.

He was hard enough that she could feel his pulse in her hand and she held him with a firmer touch, tugging and pushing on him. He drew her leg back over his, trapping her hand between them as his own reached for her under the curve of her thigh. His longest finger sank into her and they both groaned. He added a second finger and she began to shake with need. His lips had left hers to trail down her throat and across her collarbones, his free hand keeping her supported against him in the awkward position. The hut was silent other than the rasp of their breaths and the sweep of skin on skin.

She wasn't sure what snapped in him, but he pulled back abruptly, his face set in harsh lines, his eyes blazing. He lifted her clear off the floor and began to carry her across the room, his steps unsteady as his half-dropped breeches caught at his legs. She watched him glance at the bed and discard it after a mere second – she was covered in paint, after all – and then he set her down back at the table. His eyes scanned that too and with a heated smirk, he turned her back to him and pushed her forward to lean on it again.

He thrust into her smoothly, without preamble. She was ready for him and arched back, feeling the unlaced breeches against her butt. He slammed into her, jolting both of them. Again and again he did it and she saw stars each time he hit her G-spot from behind. She was pumping back against him now, meeting each snap of his hips with her own. He held onto her with one hand while the other snaked around to cup her, the pads of his fingers pressing firmly on her clit in time to his strokes.

On a keening gasp she came around his cock, her legs barely able to hold her up. His thrusts grew

more fierce, deeper and frantic as he chased his own release. She braced herself on the table and bent more, changing the angle. Her body still clenched on him in aftershocks, each one spiraling her higher until she felt like she might come again.

“More...” she begged. “Please, more.”

His fingers danced around her clit, slipping through her slick, teasing and petting. He chuckled darkly behind her as she writhed before giving in to her pleading. He circled her nub and then pinched it lightly, his cock pressed as deep as it would go into her body. She shuddered and fell over the edge of climax again, her breath leaving her as she shouted. She could feel him pulsing inside her as he followed her. They stayed that way for long minutes, held in an endless feedback loop. She dropped her head down and panted, only slowly coming back to herself as he withdrew from her with a now gentle slide.

“Damn, Solas,” she managed finally.

From her periphery she saw him pick up a clean cloth and then felt him wipe up her legs where their mess had dripped down. She couldn't even be embarrassed, she was so thoroughly wrung out. She stayed braced on the table and listened as he shed the breeches and his leg wraps. Turning her head slightly she could see him in all his naked splendor, his body lean and hard and beloved. He came back to her and took up the discarded paint brush she'd completely forgotten about.

“Shall I assist you, vhenan, in the rest of this?”

She did laugh then, a barking sound that dissolved into giggles. “You gonna get sidetracked and fuck me senseless again?”

The paint was cold on her skin and she shivered. He leaned closer, his body heat radiating onto her and dispelling her shivers. “I might.”

Chapter End Notes

I lovingly blame Iron Angel for this. We got talking about legs and muscles and whatnot and I was reminded of how Solas flirts with a warrior Lavellan and...this happened. Solas is a switch, you can't change my mind.

Reference to Bull being right can be found here:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/23789257/chapters/58343938>

The World Will Take the Rest

Chapter Notes

10/16/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Gurd Harofsen went down in a cloud of sparks and electricity and with him went the icy grip on the fortress. The braziers could be lit again, warming them all after the bitter fight. Carly took a deep breath and went up the stairs to the kneeling figure there. He raised his head to hers, his eyes a more startling green in real life than she could have imagined. The fine lines of Dirthamen's vallaslin blended into the lines on his face. He was older than she expected.

“Andaran atish'an, Inquisitor,” she said, with a sad smile and a little bow in his direction. Her gaze trailed up the flowing ribbons of his magic to where Hakkon hung motionless over their heads. When she looked back at Ameridan, he seemed to read the sympathy on her face. His expression softened.

“Inquisitor,” he replied. “Andaran atish'an. I am glad to see Drakon's friendship with our people has remained strong.”

“It has not,” she said crisply. “Emperor Drakon's son conquered the Dales. You have been missing for a long time.”

He dropped his head and Carly bit back the sound she wanted to make. She knew too well – albeit from a different perspective – what it was to lose all that you knew. “How long?”

Cassandra spoke up when Carly couldn't. “You were the last Inquisitor. There has not been another since you disappeared 800 years ago.”

“Drakon was my oldest friend,” he said, shaking his head, trying to deny what was plain. “He would have sent someone to find me.”

“He never had the chance,” Solas said. “The darkspawn that rose in the Anderfels threatened all of Orlais.”

“I see. Telana escaped the battle. Did she...do the records say what became of her?”

The others were silent as Carly dropped down to her knees so Ameridan didn't have to strain to see her. “She returned to the island. She was badly wounded and needed rest. She tried to reach you in dreams. She...died in her sleep.”

He sighed, and it was the sound of a man both weary and fondly knowing. “I asked her not to,” he said heavily. “She was a good hunter, and the love of my life, but she never...” He took another deep breath. “I never wanted this job. Hunting demons was so much easier than politics.”

“Inquisitor Ameridan,” Cassandra said. “How could the leader of the Seekers be a mage?” Carly had known this was coming. Cass's faith was so fragile still, she worried what might happen after finding out more truths about her Order.

“Has history forgotten so much?” he replied, his face crumpled with anger. “I was not a Seeker myself, as most Inquisitors were. I used my magical gifts for hunting demons and maleficarum. Do the Seekers no longer welcome the aid of mages?”

“No, that was forgotten. Along with a great many other things.”

“This is Cassandra Pentaghast, a member of the Order of Seekers,” Carly said. “The Order has recently been disbanded after the mages collectively rebelled against the Circles. Magic is now oppressed more than respected.”

Cass made a noise, but it wasn't her usual one of disgust or impatience. She shifted closer to Carly and from her periphery, she saw the Seeker nod her head. “I am honored, Inquisitor.”

“As am I,” he replied. “Your predecessors were good men and women in difficult times, as it appears you are as well. I was asked to lead, to show a united front, out of loyalty and not fear.” His pale eyes landed on Carly, they were too knowing for a man trapped in time for so long. How conscious was he during all those years? “I was needed, as I suspect you were.”

“I wasn't Inquisitor by choice, no. Whatever my life was before...” She stopped. She felt too much like she was parroting the game. Cass's hand landed on her shoulder, a show of support she hadn't looked for from a woman who recently was so disheartened to learn everything she knew was false.

Ameridan's eyes roved over their party, landing on Solas for a long moment. Whatever he saw there let him put two and two together as far as assuming they were a couple. “Take moments of happiness where you can find them. The world will take the rest.”

“I know.” She looked back up to Hakkon and let out a shuddering breath. She couldn't imagine the kind of spell it had taken to freeze himself in time like this. The Veil would have been so much stronger that long ago. Ameridan held an immense amount of power. “The dragon holds the spirit of an Avvar god,” she said, before he could. “As strong as you are, you weren't strong enough to kill it.”

“Yes. The cultists have attempted to draw that spirit to a new vessel, and it has disturbed my bindings. It is breaking free.”

“I will finish this for you, Inquisitor Ameridan. I have already defeated one would be god, another will not be a strain.”

For the first time, his mouth quirked into a smile. “Then I leave the world in good hands. The passage of years can be delayed, but they cannot be ignored. I will soon join Telana at Andraste's side.” He blinked at her, struggling to keep himself steady as the burden of his spell began to take hold. A wisp of green shot out from him to her. “Take this, it contains the last memories of an old hunter who was neither as wise or as strong as he thought.”

“He was,” Carly contradicted before he could begin to dissipate into dust, still rubbing her forehead where his magic had pinged into her mind. “He saved the world from a great danger. He will be remembered, I promise it.”

He smiled at her a final time. It seemed almost...paternal. “Fight well, Inquisitor. I am honored to have met you.”

His voice faded as his body floated away. With him gone, his staff clattered to the stone and the dragon broke free, flinging them all off their feet. Hakkon screamed at them and the air was filled

with ice crystals as the dragon launched itself up out of the fortress. Carly rolled to her feet, climbing up the rock to reach Ameridan's staff. She snagged it and cradled it in her hands. It was ironbark and chipped with marks of hard use. The Anchor thrummed to life where her palm touched it.

"We have a dragon to kill," she said. "Let's get back to the research outpost. I'm gonna want Bull and Dorian."

Her fingers were getting numb. Her draw on the bow of Telana was growing shorter as she lost feeling on the string. She saw Solas get swiped and knocked off his feet on the ice below and put greater effort into her shots, loosing a barrage of explosive and poison tipped arrows. Solas shook himself and got back up, an angry lance of lightning pouring from him. *Temper, temper, ma fen*, she thought. *You shouldn't be so close to the damned thing*. She couldn't tell if he was too far away to dip, but it seemed his spells became more controlled and he backed out of range.

At her side, Dorian was shivering, the expression on his face one of gritty determination to see this through. He dropped a fresh barrier over the two of them and with a silent exchange of looks, they jumped down onto the ice from their perch on the rocks to finish this.

Hakkon turned in circles, assaulted on all sides by the party. Dorian and Carly kept up steady fire, while Solas released arc after arc of electricity. Bull, of course, ran headlong into the lashing claws and snapping teeth, bellowing challenges and taunts alike while swinging a warhammer nearly as tall as Carly herself. Bit by bit, they wore the dragon down. With a final concentrated effort, born of long practice between the four of them, they beat on the dragon until it slumped on the ice, defeated.

Carly panted for breath, sweating under her Avvar furs and paint, even as her fingers cramped in the cold. She had only enough time to blow on them before the brilliant streak of Hakkon rose from the dead dragon, unfurling in the night sky before scattering like stardust. She smiled to see it go.

Solas took her hands in his, chafing some warmth back into them. Bull swapped the warhammer for a great sword, neatly gutting the upper stomach to spill its swallowed treasure. Dorian choked back a gagging noise and turned his back as Bull stuffed it all into a satchel. By now, this was the routine for post dragon battle clean up. Carly cracked a grin at Dorian's sickly expression. Then she focused past him to see Scout Harding approach.

"Did you follow us?" she asked.

Harding took in the scene, complete with half gutted dead dragon. She never missed a beat. "I've never seen one so close. Never got to see you fight one either. That was...intense."

"That's one word for it," Carly rejoined. Solas snorted. "How was it?"

"You guys sure know how to work together as a team, I'll give you that. I thought it would last much longer."

"We've had some practice."

"Right." Harding took a final look around before turning to face Carly again. "So...that's it? End of the Avvar god?"

"For now. The spirit that was housed in the dragon will be 'reborn' into something new. According

to Svarah Sun-Hair, anyway.”

“Then we're all done here?”

“Yeah, we're done here.”

“I'll see you back at camp, then. Gentlemen, Inquisitor.”

They all watched the dwarf delicately pick her way across the melting ice. Carly caught Bull's eye. “Snag a tooth for her, would you? Something for her to remember this by.”

Bull just grinned.

Svarah's slump in her throne was a feigned one, Carly could see, when she and Solas entered the cave. The Thane smiled at them and sat up a little straighter. “Inquisitor, you have done more for us than most of Stone-Bear Hold. It is not right that a guest do so much. The Hold has spoken, and you are no guest. You are kin. More than that, your deeds have earned a legend-mark worthy of one who broke the Jaws of Hakkon. From today, you are known to us as Inquisitor First-Thaw.”

“I am honored by such a legend-mark, Thane Sun-Hair,” Carly said, just as seriously. A moment passed before the two women shared a smile.

“You will always be welcome among us.”

“Thank you.”

“Walk with the Lady's blessing.”

The island was silent now, the spirits all returned to the Fade with help from Cole and Solas. The pair of them stood aside and let Carly go on ahead to the crumbling hut that held Telana's bones. She knelt there a moment, not really in prayer, but in thought. Then she laid Ameridan's ironwood staff next to the the skeleton. The flowers folded under it, releasing their scent into the briny air.

“I know neither of you are here,” she spoke softly, unsure of why she even felt the need, but heeding it just the same. “You've passed on to whatever afterlife exists in Thedas. Back on Earth, we remember the dead where they lie, and we mark the spot so we can return to visit them.” She huffed to herself. “I don't even know if that matters here. You probably can't hear me in whatever form you've taken now. It's a weird thing to do anyway when you think about it. Ah well, rest in peace. The world took the rest, but you have each other.”

She listened to the sound of sea birds and waves and the wind, too many racing thoughts and feelings going around in her head. She couldn't think of anything else to say. She got up and brushed grit from her knees before turning to her companions.

“Can we cover it with stones?”

“Of course, vhenan,” Solas replied, no evidence of of anything but respect on his face or in his voice. Cole just looked at the bones lying there so peacefully, the staff next to them. Carly stepped back and gave Solas room to pull a wave of pebbles and rocks from the beach until the spot was covered over in a solid cairn.

“Thank you,” she whispered at his side. His fingers laced with hers and held them tight. “C'mon, time to go home.”

Chapter End Notes

I've cleaned up the tags a bit, in case anyone was wondering why they look different. A little more streamlined, and superfluous character tags taken out (new rule: character must show up in more than one chapter AND have multiple speaking lines to be added to tags). I know on mobile it ends up being a wall of text before you even get to the story, so, I just wanted to make it a bit...less.

A Part of the Whole

Chapter Notes

10/20/20

A sprinkle of headcannon glitter ahead.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly went to the shattered window and looked out, seeing the expanse of the Exalted Plains across the river from where they stood. It was hard to believe that just weeks ago she was shivering in the magical ice of the Hakkonites, and now she was back here, sweltering in the relentless sun. She looked back around the room. They were in a ruined manor house that once belonged to Sylaise, according to Solas, half collapsed and yet still standing firm enough to keep its Eluvian safe from the passage of time. He was...well, puttering would be the best word, behind her as she admired a view wholly unique from anything she'd ever gotten to see in the game.

"I have found it, vhenan," he said.

"Okay." She couldn't tear her eyes from the view. Just as the guardian statue seen in the distance on the game's map loomed tall on the horizon, from here she could see the broad bridges that were now little more than broken arches that dotted the landscape of several boards. She wondered what they had been used for, since most travel between locations was done by Eluvian when the elves ruled Thedas. Or were they a remnant of Tevinter occupation?

A chuckle broke her reveries. "Are you coming?"

"Yeah."

There was a click like a lock being opened and she felt Solas's hand on her shoulder. She turned to see him watching her, a smile lurking in the corners of his mouth. "I thought you did not care for this land."

"Well, I mean, it's depressing as hell, knowing what's happened to it. Seeing it from here, though..."

"The Fade is well populated here. I would show it to you, but it is more dangerous than most places."

"I believe it. How many wars were fought here?"

"Too many." He led her away from the windows and to where the doors of the vault now stood open, cleverly hidden in the walls so that if one didn't know they were there, one would never see them.

They went in and down a set of stairs. Solas waved his hand to light the veilfire, illuminating the windowless space. The hallway was long and filled with dust, but the room Solas took them to was well organized, if a bit shabby from the endless years of neglect. A wide desk sat in the center of it, surrounded by now shattered globes that once held something he called memory crystals, shimmering with lyrium. Solas picked through the pieces remaining while Carly busied herself by

strolling the wall, looking at the art there and recognizing his style in it.

“Did Sylaise ask you to paint this?”

His head popped up from his searching and he met her eyes, startled. “June did.”

“Were you close?” she asked, looking back at the painting. It was a garden, full of healing plants, surrounding a central fire that burned a steady blue. The geometric patterns in the flames were what had given away that Solas had painted it; it reminded her of the fires he had put in the murals in the rotunda.

“We were, once.”

He moved to the other side of the desk, picking through the shards there too and she moved on around the room, careful where she put her feet. She saw a glimmer of crystal and picked it up to add to his pile on the desk. She had no idea how he planned to reassemble them into working order, but he seemed confident that he could do it. “Can I explore a little?”

“Certainly. This wing should all be unlocked. Just be cautious with what you touch. Sylaise was secretive on some things and trapped them well.”

She left him to it and wandered down the hall, peeking into room after room. Most of them were empty or so destroyed they might as well be empty, but the last one she opened the door to was different. She stepped inside and let her eyes adjust to the gloom. The simple pedestal of stone was achingly familiar, as was the orb that rested on it. It flickered with purple light, faint and slowly swirling. The room around it was covered in mosaics, now peeling from the walls. She recognized June's anvil and the curling of Sylaise's flames although their faces were obscured in the shadows. She didn't dare step further into the room and instead backed out, returning to where Solas was still gathering crystal shards.

“Ma fen, I found something I think you should see.”

He dusted off his hands and rose to follow her, and she stood aside to let him enter the room without her. She stayed at the door as he crossed the space and put a hand over the top of the orb without touching it.

“Well done, vhenan, and very smart of you not to touch it.”

“Whose is it?”

He tilted his head, as if he was listening. “No one's. It is a repository for memories, like the crystals. The power is nearly depleted from it, but if I am correct, it holds locations.”

“So, it's a map.”

“More accurately it is a legend of a map.”

It was dark enough in the room that the flare of his eyes was bright and she saw his fingers lay against the orb lightly. When it was dark he lifted it from the pedestal and carried it to where she stood, letting her take it from him. She was mildly surprised that he was handing it off to her. And again surprised at how different it felt from his orb.

“It is safe for you to touch now.”

“What did you do?”

"I think you would say I retuned it. You already carry the Anchor of one focus, you do not need another." He was smirking.

"That's fair." She hefted the orb, feeling the grooves of it and the small weight of it, although it felt like the same material. "Why is it lighter than yours?"

"The process that created it was sufficiently reduced that it does not have the same capacity for power that mine does."

"I see. Smaller hard drive." She snorted. "It's a laptop rather than a server." He raised an eyebrow at her, but didn't ask for clarity. She shook her head with a laugh. "Never mind, it makes sense to me is all I'm saying. Do we need anything else here?"

"I have found what I could. There should be a location in that focus that will lead me to the next piece. It's good that you found it. It would have taken me much longer to remember where all these places are without it."

"Good to know you aren't a walking GPS."

"A what?"

"Global Positioning System, it's a digital map, basically."

He went back to the 'office' and swept up his collected shards into a small container and stowed it in his pack. "Your world found fascinating ways to overcome a lack of magic."

"You could say that, I guess. Never thought of it that way." She passed the orb from hand to hand as he finished up, extinguishing the veilfire and leading them back to the open air of the ruins. "Where to next, ma fen?"

"Suledin Keep."

She had to admit, traveling by Eluvian network was convenient. They arrived in Emprise du Lion as the sun was just starting to set and only had to travel on foot enough to get from the nearest camp to the Keep, a walk of maybe an hour. Of course, the bear set them back a bit. For two it was a challenge and Carly was nearly out of arrows when she turned to him, exasperated.

"Just turn it to stone already, I know you can." He gave her a mildly sheepish look and his eyes flashed. The bear stopped in mid snarl, the crackle of flesh turning to stone quiet in the forest. She clucked at him and gathered up what arrows hadn't been in the beast when he killed it. "Honestly, it's like you forget I know this about you."

"I am no longer in the habit of casually using these abilities in front of anyone. Nor is my power infinite, contrary to how it might look."

"I know. Sorry." She sighed. "I just don't want you to feel like you have to hide it from me, Solas, especially if we get ambushed by wildlife we can't handle normally. I know what you are. I know what you can do. I mean, equally as acceptable would have been mind blasting it to hell."

He snorted at her phrasing, but his face stayed serious. "No, you would have been caught in the backlash of that."

"Fair enough." She took his hand in hers, squeezing his fingers until he returned the pressure. She

let him lead, since she was totally turned around and off the map, so to speak. After a while he drew her closer, letting go of her hand to wrap his arm around her.

“Thank you, vhenan.”

“For what?”

“Taking me as I am.”

“I always will, my love.”

He pressed a kiss into her hair and they walked on. The Keep came into view, lit up with torches and swarming with Inquisition forces. It had become quite the trade center now, and they barely recognized the place. And of course, Carly had to stop in and speak with her leaders there. Solas wandered off and she didn't see him again for another hour.

“Everything is well?” he asked, handing her a bowl of something that steamed and made her stomach growl. She scooped up the hearty stew as they crossed the courtyard that now served as a market and nodded.

“Yup, everything is ship shape. You find it?”

“Of course, it wasn't lost to me. We will have to wait until later before we go in, however. I do not want to be followed.”

They sat down on the stairs where not so long ago they'd fought Imshael and Carly looked around, wondering what he was thinking being back in this place. *A retreat for lovers*, she recalled thinking it reminded her of.

“Of a sort,” he murmured.

“Good memories or bad?”

“Both.”

She put her hand on his leg and leaned on him a little. “Go ahead and tell me if I'm brushing up against things you don't want to talk about.”

“I said I would not hide things from you.”

“That doesn't mean you need to feel obligated to sate my morbid curiosity either. Not if it hurts.”

“It does not. Not anymore.” He stood up then, seeing that she was done eating, and held out his hand. “Let me show you the view here. Since you seem to enjoy seeing a different perspective than you know.”

“I'd like that.”

Chapter End Notes

Woohoo! This has broken 120K words!

Freedom to Cross

Chapter Notes

10/23/20

There's a fair amount of Elvish used in this chapter, translations will be in the bottom note as always.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly ended up using one of her stealth grenades to cover their retreat into the portion of the Keep no one else knew was there. Solas then closed up the entrance behind them, sealing it with a touch so they couldn't be followed. She waited patiently in the total dark until he found a wall sconce and called up the memory of flame to it. He lit a torch and she got her first glimpse of the inside. A wide spiral staircase went down into the darkness below them, although regularly spaced openings along the walls showed it hadn't always been underground. With the torch in one hand and hers in the other, he led the way down. From what she could tell, the part they knew on the surface must have originally been some kind of rooftop garden.

“How did a few thousand years completely bury this place?” she asked when they emerged into a broad hall rather like Skyhold's. Tall windows graced the room and what she could see of the branching hallways, the glass now long gone, if indeed it had even been glass held in the panes to begin with. Tattered tapestries still hung from crooked hangers, some of which had fallen to molder on the floor. It was eerily quiet and still; not even mice or insects had burrowed in. And yet it didn't feel haunted. Just like Skyhold's foundations, magic had seeped into the very stones of the keep, protecting it.

“It wasn't entirely the passage of time. The Veil caused it to fall. To be completely honest, I'm surprised as much of it remains as it does. I am certain the lowest levels are completely collapsed under the weight of themselves. It is fortunate that we do not have to go there.”

“What are you looking for here?”

“Ghilan'nain kept copies of her notes here once. I am hoping they are still here.”

“Her notes? Like...scientific notes?”

“Yes.”

“Ma fen, what are you up to?”

He gave her a grin, entirely too much wolfish cunning in it. “Repairing the world.”

He lit more braziers, bathing the hidden keep in a pale blue glow. *Memories of flame that predate the Veil*, she thought, remembering how they'd talked about that once. Movement in a corner caught Carly's eye and she tugged on his arm to point. A vaguely humanoid shape rose from the darkness, floating serenely until noticed. She recognized it as a spirit.

“Hello, Amelan. I did not know you were still here,” Solas said, obviously surprised.

“Ar tel'varem,” the spirit said, a whisper so soft she nearly missed it. “Vir danem, ha'giren.”

“Vir tuathem, varas ma.” The spirit sagged, almost in relief it seemed, and Solas turned to her. “Do you think you can open a rift?”

“Here?”

“Yes. It does not need to be large. Just enough for a spirit to pass through.”

“Ha'giren,” Amelan said. “Ar rosem, ar shivesem bellanaris.”

“Ma *revas*,” Solas emphasized. “Ar lasa ma halam'shira.”

“Ma nuvenin, ha'giren.”

Carly raised her hand to the side of the spirit and thought back to the time she opened the rift when they fell at Adamant. It was like drawing the Veil into a crumple, letting it fold or tear on itself. A pinprick lit up the darkness and she widened it some, not enough for anything to come through from the Fade, but enough for Amelan to slip into it. It hurt, and it didn't take more than a moment for her arm to start shaking, but the spirit was floating towards it already.

“Dareth shiral, Amelan,” Solas said.

“Ma serranas, ha'giren,” the spirit replied as it grew pale and even more translucent, sucked into the other side with barely a ripple. She let the rift close with a small pop, pushing back the tiny piece of the Fade she'd pulled through.

Solas was quiet then, lost in thought perhaps. She massaged her palm and let him have his moment. She could only imagine what it must have felt like, to see something from so deep in his past, still bound, still dutifully watching over this place with no knowledge of what had happened and no way home. Trapped because of the Veil. Until now. No wonder the keep didn't feel haunted. She knew she would experience it again if and when she ever got to Vir Dirthara. She made a mental note to tell him about the spirits remaining in the shattered library, equally as trapped.

Or perhaps not, since none of them had ever called her 'master' when she played the game. They weren't bound to service the way Amelan had been. Either way, she decided, it was a conversation for another day.

“That felt good,” she said softly. Quiet enough that if he was truly deep in his thoughts it shouldn't interrupt them, but loud enough that if he heard her he would know that she was glad she'd gotten to release a spirit rather than having to fight it.

He turned to her then, his usual stoic mask dropped away to let her see the anguish on him, fading fast as he took in her satisfaction with what she'd been able to do. She held his face in her hands, even though her fingers trembled in her left one.

“Thank you, vhenan. I..I did not know there were still spirits bound here. I would have come back much sooner.”

“Hey, the spirit is free now. That's what matters, right? Free and as alive as spirits get. And home.”

“Yes.” A smile broke through and he leaned down to kiss her.

“Do you think there are more still here?”

He closed his eyes and she got the feeling he was listening. Or maybe doing some sort of mental casting to see if any other spirits lingered. When he opened them he seemed calmer, a little more at peace. "No, Amelan was the only one. Come, we have work to do."

The keep was far vaster than Carly expected it to be. Room after room, level after level, down long corridors and hidden, partially buried hallways they searched until Solas found what he was looking for. More crystals – this time whole – and just like that he was done. He tucked the crystals into a carrying case and put them in his pack with the shards from Sylaise's manor and the map orb. Carly was now exhausted and her hand ached fiercely. Solas took one look at her cradling it against her chest and gave her a thoroughly reproofing scowl.

"You should have said something."

"You were busy."

"I am not now." He held out his hand peremptorily for hers, an echo of a time long ago, when they first knew each other. She had no hesitation now to gratefully accept his healing and laid her hand in his, breathing deeply as his heat seeped into her skin. He impatiently tossed a mage light over their heads, blinding her after hours of nothing but veilfire. In the bright gleam it was clear how far the creeping green veins had grown out from the slash of the Anchor. Tendrils crossed her wrist to race up her forearm as well as down to her fingers. "Carly..."

"I know. You know you can take it now. You have the strength."

He covered her hand with his, healing pouring out into the space between. He shook his head. "I do. But the damage is done."

"Yes, it is," she said, gently agreeing. "It's all right, ma fen. It really is."

"It is not. I did not want this for you."

"I know. Plans have a way of going sideways." With him in this mood, she couldn't possibly point out that it was the hallmark of his plans, to go awry.

He finished what healing he could offer and cupped her hand to bring it to his lips. Then he sighed, an unpleasant decision made. "You need rest. There should still be at least one functional sleeping room in here."

She made some effort not to laugh at his denigrating tone, but gave up after a moment. It was obvious that if he had his way they would leave, but she wasn't in any shape for more walking. And he knew she didn't really want to be carried back to the Eluvian either. He took her back up the winding central stairs to an upper level and poked his head into bedrooms until he found one that was still serviceable. The look on his face told her all she needed to know about whose it was. That and the carvings of hawks, hares and archers all over the place.

Wards had been in place that he erased with something akin to violence, but they had done their job, and the room was pristine compared to all the others they'd seen. He pulled back the covers of an ornate and huge bed, making sure she would be comfortable enough. She took off her knee high boots and went about unbuckling herself from the layers of her armor so she could rest. She didn't even dare ask if he was joining her, and wasn't surprised when he kissed her goodnight and left.

She wasn't sure she would sleep, alone and in Andruil's room to boot, but it wasn't long before she found herself in the Fade. Solas must have found somewhere to sleep, since he was there too,

talking quietly with Amelan, now revived in the home denied to the spirit for years uncounted. The former guardian presented as male, his smile warm and welcoming once Solas introduced her to him. It was a much better way to spend her sleeping hours than she'd feared, guessing at some of the history of her room. She'd take it.

Chapter End Notes

Amelan – Keeper/Guardian

Ar tel'varem. Vir danem, ha'giren – I could not go. The way is broken, master (lit. respected owner).

Vir tuathem, varas ma – The way is repaired, you can go.

Ar rosem, ar shivesem bellanaris – I survived, I gave a binding oath (lit. eternally vowed).

Ma revas. Ar lasa ma halam'shira – You are free. I give permission for you to abandon your duty.

Courtesy of Fenxshiral's Project Elvhen

Snippet of their discussion on the nature of veilfire can be read here:

<https://archiveofourown.org/works/23789257/chapters/59301109>

OMG, dear readers, principle wording is complete! I can't believe it. Please note the updated chapter total.

Light In the Dark**

Chapter Notes

10/27/20

NSFW

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly woke surprisingly well rested, all things considered. The room glowed with torchlight – real torchlight, bright and yellow. Solas must have been back at some point. She looked around the room now that she could see it well. There were long mosaics along the walls, depicting various hunts and even a scene of sacrifice. The furniture was opulent and oversized, glittering with inlaid jewels and covered in rare leathers and furs. The bed itself could easily fit six people, if two of them were sideways at the end of it. Tall posts stood at the corners of it, shaped like tree trunks, carved with little birds and woodland creatures whose eyes were gems set into the wood. She felt very small in it. But she had to admit it was comfortable, the mattress under her was plush, the pillows fluffy.

The door opened before she could get up and she saw Solas enter, carrying a small box and balancing a steaming mug on top of it. He kicked the door closed behind him, a mundane action that set her to giggling. He looked up and saw her and a small smile crossed his lips.

“On dhea, vhenan. Sleep well?”

“Yeah, actually. Where did you end up?”

“The upper hall. I was comfortable enough,” he added before she could say anything to the contrary. She swallowed down what she wanted to say, knowing this place – and this room – likely held unhappy memories for him. He came to the side of the bed and handed her the mug, sliding the box so that it sat between them. She lifted the mug and sniffed it.

“Where did you find Antivan coffee?”

“The market above.”

She sipped it and found that he'd remembered how she liked it, sweet and creamy. She cradled the mug in her hands and rested back against the pillows to watch him open the box. “So is this breakfast in bed? Any particular reason?”

“We do not often have the chance to indulge.”

He lifted out a pastry that literally dripped frosting and jam and she bit her lip at the gleam in his eye. She knew very well that one was his. Thankfully the gooey mess was resting on a plate, which he set aside to hand her a plate of her own. Hers had a flaky crust and she could smell the meat, onions and spices before it was even in front of her. He handed over a fork as well and leaned back against the post at the end of the bed and began to eat. She managed to balance the plate in her lap and sort of cut into her food with one hand, her coffee in the other, quietly enjoying her savory breakfast as she watched him.

His eyes roved around the room and while she supposed the tightness in his jaw could be from chewing, she didn't think it was. "You all right?"

"I am fine, vhenan."

"Uh huh." *I know this place holds memories, probably awful ones, she thought. But I'm not going to ask until you're ready to tell me.*

His eyes met hers and lingered; it was obvious he'd heard her. It was hard to tell what was going on in his head. His eyes were intense, a small frown putting a crease between his brows. He often looked that way when they traveled, as if he was squinting against the light or perpetually displeased. She rarely questioned it, she was used to it from the game. He made no further comments, his expression smoothed out and he went back to his syrupy...*thing*. She could barely watch him consume that much sugar first thing in the morning. She'd reached a point in her own breakfast where she just picked it up to eat it. It was essentially street food anyhow, meant to be eaten on the go. She washed it down with the rest of her coffee and leaned forward to put her dirty plate and fork back in the box along with her empty cup.

She slid out of the bed and wandered to the small but still functional washroom to tidy up and do her business, feeling his eyes on her bare legs as she went across the room. She had left her shirt on for sleeping, but that was it. When she came back into the bedroom she saw that he was still sitting there, somewhat lost in thought. She stood in front of him with some idea of getting him up and moving so they could head out, but he snagged her and pulled her close. His hands slipped under the hem of the shirt to cup her bare backside and the look he turned on her was no longer in any way distracted.

"Solas...?"

He tipped back his head, a change from their usual positions, but his invitation was clear and she took it. His lips still tasted of frosting, but she didn't care. Without breaking the kiss he scooted backwards onto the bed, pulling her along with him, his hands guiding her legs over his to straddle. From there his palms slid up her back, flat against her shoulder blades. Then without any warning he flipped her, turning them both to align with the pillows before coming to rest in the juncture of her thighs with a soft satisfied hum.

The box that held their dirty dishes slid off the bed and crashed to the floor, but neither of them noticed. Solas pushed her shirt up, exposing her skin to lips and teeth and tongue. She arched into him, her legs tightening around his hips. He pulled away just enough to strip off his sweater and she took the opportunity to toss her shirt too, leaving herself completely bare for him. His eyes gleamed in the torchlight, fingers of one hand floating on her skin like whispers. With the other, he worked his breeches loose. She watched him shimmy out of them and throw them behind him.

She opened her arms, welcoming him back to her embrace. His body covered hers, his skin brushing against hers with a delicious rasp. He moved down the length of her, nipping her skin to elicit gasps and giggles by turn. His eyes were burning when they met hers, his face set in an expression she couldn't quite parse. Hungry, yes, but also determined. And something else almost like anger. He didn't speak.

What he *did* do was push one leg wide and over his shoulder, his mouth against the center of her. She arched again, moaning out his name as he licked her. He took his time, exploring each dip and fold with nothing but his tongue, the grip he had on her thigh tightening almost to painful. His other arm banded across her stomach, holding her effectively in place while he tormented her. He flicked the tip of his tongue against her clit and she jumped. He did it again and again, relentless without pressure, building up the tension inside her to a boiling point. She groaned when he lifted

his head, eyes on hers as he let go of her thigh and pushed two fingers into her.

Then he crooked them and she saw stars. She could feel his eyes on her as she took her pleasure from him. He gave and gave, tipping her over the edge of her climax. She cried out into the empty room – a rarity for them. Every window in Skyhold opened up to the castle below, and there was never a question of being this loud in a camp. She took full advantage of their privacy. All she heard from him was a shuddering breath.

He sat up on his knees, her legs splayed out around him. With his head tilted to the side in her favorite quizzical angle he smiled at her, slow and tender. Then he extinguished the torches, plunging the room into complete darkness. A small spark grew in his hand and he lifted the mage light deliberately above her head, bathing just her in its glow. She could barely see the shadow of him wiping his face with his arm as he looked at her. He still didn't speak, but she didn't need him to. *You are my light.*

Her heart stuttered in her chest. She reached for him, desperate now to feel him against her, solid in her arms. Whatever mood had taken him, she knew she wanted to help him expel it. He leaned over her, taking himself in hand to line up with her entrance. She lifted her hips into his thrust wordlessly, not wanting to break the silence. She couldn't help the moan that escaped her, however, when he filled her so completely she could feel his hip bones on her backside.

He moved in her with care, languorous strokes that made her breath hitch. His eyes never left hers. She reached up to cup his face in her hands, cradling him like he was fragile. She felt more than saw his smile. The steady pace of his body drew hers up and she wanted *more*. She tightened her legs around him, tried to steer him to greater effort. He nipped the edge of her palm instead, jolting her and letting her see the laughter in his eyes at her reaction. She just raised an eyebrow at him and squeezed her inner muscles. The curve of his lips turned crafty.

He took her hands from his face and pinned them above her head. The angle meant her hips rose off the bed entirely, like she was laying in his lap. *Damned height difference*, she thought and his face filled with mirth, still wordless.

Please, she begged in her head. *Please...*

He finally obliged her, pushing into her until he could go no further. Again and again, each thrust taking on a more rhythmic slap until they were both sweating and breathless from the pace of it. Pressure built low in her belly, spiraling up out of her core and to her limbs. When she came it was blinding, setting off trembles in her legs, and goosebumps down her spine starting from her scalp. And she knew she shouted.

He let go of her wrists then, folded himself over her, let her dig her nails into his back as he pounded into her, over and over, chasing release. She could feel him pulse in her when he reached it, a low groan in her ear the only sound he made. She held him close through it, her body clenching on him involuntarily. He stayed there until their heartbeats had slowed and the slickness of their skin turned tacky. Only then did he roll off her, sprawling out on the big bed with a gusty exhale. She watched the mage light bob over her head, the rest of the room in shadow, hidden and unseen. She didn't speak until she no longer felt like her nerve endings were mush.

“Ma fen...did you just cathartically fuck my brains out in your ex's bed?”

He laughed, a sudden open and joyful sound. He rolled back to her and elbowed himself up so he could see her face. He was still smiling. “And if I did?”

She hummed, her body still sizzling. “I am not complaining. It was damn good.”

“It was,” he agreed, leaning over and kissing the end of her nose. “I am still quite ready to leave, however, if you are.”

“Yeah...give me a minute or three. Gotta find my brains. Pretty sure they're scattered all over.”

He gave her a final kiss and chuckled under his breath. “You do that, I shall pack.”

Whatever it was had been purged. No ghosts remained. Or maybe it was more that something was made whole again. His sense of self, perhaps. His free will to love as he chose. *You are the only light I need.*

Chapter End Notes

On dhea - good morning.

Courtesy of Fenxshiral's Project Elvhen

A lot of headcannons came together to make this chapter's headspace. The connection between Solas and Andruil. He and Ghilan'nain having a lot in common from a creative standpoint, both relatively young compared to the others. A spirit of wisdom's unquenchable thirst for knowledge and experiences, twisted into pride. A shrine to Fen'Harel in Ghilan'nain's Grove. The placement of the statues in Suledin Keep. Andruil being jealous and/or angry that he 'hunted the halla without her blessing' and holding him against his will in retaliation (yes the bedposts are carved like trees on purpose here). His desire to remain in control of the relationship and the dynamic within it, which is partially about trust. Carly's knowledge - or strong supposition - about all of it.

I don't know if I'd go so far as to say Solas was a victim of rape, but there was a lot of coercion, or at least attempted coercion. Regardless of his relationship with either one of them, it was plainly unhealthy. It left marks on him. I feel like this is why consent is so sacred to him, both as a means to be as unlike the other Evanuris as he can and because he would never cause anyone to suffer what he did. Thoughts?

Safe From Harm

Chapter Notes

10/30/20

Happy Hallowe'en! No spookiness here, just fluff.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She didn't know how he did it, how he was able to turn an Eluvian's path from one place to another. According to Morrigan, it took a massive amount of power, but he showed no signs of any strain. Of course, she countered to herself, he wouldn't. Not now. The only piece he was missing from his full return to godlike strength was the Anchor. And for some reason he hadn't taken it yet.

At any rate, they stepped through the Eluvian and entered into a long, dusty hallway. The stones were dressed in a style she recognized as elven and the more she looked around saw evidence of strange phsyscis, the more she realized where they were.

“Vir Dirthara,” she breathed.

“Yes. You are familiar?”

“Solas...really?”

“Ahh, is this part of the game then?” He lit a torch from the ever present veilfire and led them through the place until they reached the library proper. Archivist spirits lingered, far more of them than she'd known would be there. He spoke quietly with them, letting her take the torch with her to explore the stacks and shattered remains.

It was both exactly as she thought it would be, and yet so different from the limitations of a game setting where the player merely wandered through to solve puzzles to get to the next mirror. Of course she couldn't read any of the titles, but she found one that was illustrated and she wrestled with the decision on how to look at the book and still carry the torch. A spirit floated to her side.

“Does the honored patron require assistance?” the Archivist asked with a multi-toned voice. It was speaking in the common tongue and not Elvish. Could they adapt that quickly or had they managed to overhear the language enough to pick it up over the centuries they'd been stuck here?

“I...not exactly, I'm just trying to figure out how to look at this without dropping my torch.”

“There is a wall sconce at the end of this stack, if the patron wishes more light.”

“Oh, thank you.” The spirit dipped and floated away. Carly lit the sconce and when she put down the torch on the floor, it extinguished. *Well, that's a bit of gameplay crossover I didn't expect*, she thought. She sat against the wall under the light and looked through the book she'd found.

The pictures were intricate and almost alive on the pages, some of them in a disturbing way. She couldn't make heads or tails of many of them, but it seemed to be a catalog of known plants and animals from a particular region. The more she looked at it and recognized the plants, the more she thought it must be from either the Hissing Wastes or the Western Approach, before the Second

Blight had destroyed the ecosystem. From time to time she heard Solas's voice asking an Archivist where he might find specific tomes, but other than that, it was quiet. She didn't even know how long she spent there, leafing through the picture book.

The scuff of his foot drew her attention up and she saw that he carried a fur wrapped bundle in one hand and a stack of books balanced magically in the other. A mage light floated over his head. He was smirking at her.

“Are you ready to go?” he asked.

“Yeah.” She stood up and closed her book, intending to leave it on a table just like she would if this was a regular library.

“Bring it, if you like. It will not be missed.” His tone implied what she should have figured out for herself. There were very few Elvhen left to utilize this place, and many of them were already in Skyhold. She gave him a sheepish grin and tucked the book firmly against her chest. If he was too busy with whatever project he had going on, she could ask one of them to help her decipher the script. A mental image of Abelas teaching her to read Elvish, complete with his typically aggrieved expression, flitted through her head.

“Did you find what you needed?” she asked, keeping herself on track with the present.

“And then some.”

They exited the Eluvian back into Skyhold and the glass went dark as Solas's eyes flashed, exerting his will over it to keep everyone else out. Carly locked the door to the chamber that had once been Morrigan's in a more utilitarian fashion with a key and they carried their assortment of things up to their chamber. Solas tossed the wrapped bundle he'd brought on the bed and carefully set down the books on Carly's desk. He started to go through them, organizing them in a more logical order to himself now that he had room to lay them all out.

“What's that?” she pointed to the bundle.

“It is for you. I believe it is a tradition to give a gift upon the celebration of a birthday, yes?”

“Yes,” she giggled. Varric must have said something, because she knew she hadn't. “Can I...?”

“Of course. Open it.”

The bundle was held together with straps in slip knots that were easy to undo. Inside the bundle of leather was gleaming armor that she instantly recognized even seeing it in sections. Those faces on the joint pieces were pretty distinctive after all. She looked up at him where he now stood at the end of the bed, leaning against the post and watching her. She knew she must be making the most comical face, since he smirked. “This is...this is the *god armor*. For me?”

Now an eyebrow rose with the smirk, turning his expression wolfish in the best way. “It is Sentinel armor,” he said. “And I think you will find it much more comfortable to wear than any *human* design.”

“But...I'm so tiny. It would never fit me. Look at you, you're all obnoxiously long and lean and I'm just...”

He pulled out the soft links of the chainmail, all of a piece like a jumpsuit and held it against her side, showing her how it matched her height. “Admittedly, this is sized more for a child.”

“You had children in your armies?”

“Not as you think of them, no. But training began young for those with aptitude. Armor such as this was used for training purposes, to allow a young soldier to grow accustomed to it. Still, it can withstand attack just as well as my own.”

Then there was nothing to do but try it on. She got undressed to her smalls and he showed her how to pull the chainmail on. The inside of the suit was soft, like fleece, and the links were tightly woven but utterly fluid with her movement. He hooked the closures on her back and she turned to the mirror to see the effect. It hugged every line of her, loose only at armpit, elbow and waist, to facilitate twisting motion. She wiggled her fingers and watched how the tiny joined plates followed the movement. The only places not covered in loops were the bottoms of her feet.

“Wow.”

He smiled and picked up the first piece of overlay for the chainmail. The chest plate was in two sections, joining with buckles against her ribs. The neck of it went over her head, flexing slightly to fit. Boots with little wolf feet, greaves, shin guards...all buckled into place with easy to reach releases so she could get in and out of it on her own. It was like it was made for her and she wondered if Elvhen armor was enchanted to fit. It didn't glow like most enchanted things did, but then again, the ancient elves wouldn't have used the dwarven techniques she was used to.

The armor was light and breathed better than she expected from such intricate layers. Solas grinned at her surprise and delight, finally lifting out the leather jacket and hood, holding it out so she could slip her arms in it as easily as putting on a hoodie. She hooked the frog in the front of it herself, letting the material settle on her shoulders and down her arms. The hood alone weighed more than the chest piece. She pulled it up, seeing how it covered her ears with comfortable roominess, shadowing her face just like every elf she'd ever seen in one of these. The final bits were the gauntlets that fit over the chainmail and kept the ends of the sleeves tucked in.

She barely recognized herself in the mirror, turning this way and that to see how it fit her. She met Solas's eyes in the glass and smiled. “All I'm missing is a wolf pelt or a cloak flowing to my knees to cover my ass.”

She turned in the mirror to see said behind, frowning at how closely the armor followed the curve of it. She felt nearly naked even bundled under so many layers. Solas laughed before gathering up the skin the armor had been wrapped in. He unfolded it fully and she snorted when he showed her the toggles that had been hiding in the folds. She turned back around and let him fasten them to the backs of her shoulders, cleverly attaching into hooks that went through gaps in the jacket she hadn't even realized were there.

“Efficient,” she said, barely keeping her chortles under control as he worked. He nodded absently, lifting a loose end to drape across her front, the way he wore it. The straps that had held the bundle together went around her waist, tying off into a belt. “And that holds the whole thing in place.”

“Precisely.”

She pushed back the hood, letting it fall over the wolf pelt. She looked like she was cosplaying him. “Good lord. I look...”

“Elvhen.”

“Yeah,” she breathed out. She turned to him, seeing him assess how she wore it, straightening out a buckle or overlapping edge here and there. She lifted a hand to his face, cupping his cheek in her

chainmail covered palm, marveling at how much she could feel through the links still. He leaned in and met her kiss, a reversal of something she'd been terrified would happen if things had gone sideways. Now it was almost...ordinary. Any fear she felt at the prospect of losing him had long since passed. "Thank you, ma fen."

"Da'banal, vhenan. You will need it, and I could provide it."

She cocked a brow at him. "I get the sense there's more to this than just dressing up your girlfriend."

His lips quirked, hiding a smile. "You are, as ever, correct. The Deep Roads will be fraught with dangerous things, and resources will be scarce. I would have you as protected as I can. We do not know what we will face down there."

"I do. Some darkspawn, Sha-Brytol and a rock wraith guardian."

"Just so. This will protect you from them all."

She grinned at him. "And it looks damn good."

He finally relented and let his smile out. "It does indeed."

"I'm not shaving half my head, though," she teased. He laughed and pulled her in close to kiss her again. Then he playfully sighed.

"Acceptable, I suppose."

Chapter End Notes

Does Solas like to play dress up with Carly? Absolutely. Are we going to judge him for it? Probably not.

What We Cannot Know

Chapter Notes

11/3/20

tosses out more headcannon glitter and runs away like a fae

Carly was wondering if she made the right decision. It had happened so fast, a movement in the dark, anticipated because she remembered the shock of it while playing the game. She'd grabbed hold of Valta's shield without thinking, moving it in front of them both before the weapon of the Sha-Brytol could strike and kill Renn. The splinter of the shield cracking was loud in the silence that followed, a gleaming arrow of lyrium that had been meant for his body stopped in the metal. The ensuing battle hadn't given any of them time to talk about it, or even for Renn to think about why this strange elf had saved his life.

Watching him sit with Valta, their faces growing more animated as their latest argument built up speed, she wondered if he was happy that he was alive when he'd been ready to lay down his life by his oath. She remembered what Valta would say when he died and they returned him to the Stone. *"Renn never wanted this life. He was a cobbler, a good one. He joined the Legion to pay his father's debts."*

"You look very solemn, vhenan," Solas said, sitting down next to her at their camp, so close their legs and shoulders touched. "What is wrong?"

"I changed something today. And now I'm not sure how I feel about it." She looked at the pair of dwarves and shook her head. "Funny how such a little thing can change everything. I don't know how this will play out now."

"Renn was meant to die then?"

She wasn't at all surprised he'd figured out what she'd done. For one thing, he'd been standing right next to her when she did it. For another, well...he could still dip, and he did so nearly all the time now that he had most of his godlike powers. She leaned her head on his arm, taking the comfort he offered.

"What do you think it has changed?" he asked softly.

"Valta. She won't have the grief of his loss hanging on her. She might not take the same risks. The whole ending of this might have gotten...skewed."

"How is this supposed to end?"

"The Titan goes back to sleep after making a connection with her. Now, I don't know if it will happen. I always thought, whenever I played, that Renn's death was needless. A shock factor, introducing the player to the Sha-Brytol and their ruthlessness. They allow no one to pass, even someone as pure as Valta. Not until...after. I just wanted to save him from a pointless death and now I feel like I've screwed everyone over. What if his death *did* have meaning, because there wasn't another way to make her willing to give up everything to stay? She loves him."

Solas snorted under his breath. She didn't need him to say that he understood. At the heart of it, his decision to create the Veil was the same. An act meant to be a saving grace for a people he loved, unpredictable at best. Ruinous at worst. Given the choice to go back and do it over, she didn't know if she could stand idly by and watch a companion be cut down. Even for the greater good. But she was treading waters she couldn't hope to recognize with this decision. Was it thoughtless or was it something she needed to get used to? Soon enough her store of foreknowledge would be used up and everything would be new and unknown.

“People always say to trust your gut,” she said, dropping her voice to a whisper. “But my gut instinct is pulled in so many directions by everything I know. It's hard to tell when I'm making a decision based on already knowing the outcome or if it's just the right thing to do. Cole once told me that compassion is hard and harrowing. I think I know what that means now.”

“Compassion is not painless. And it is a choice. I admire it in you.” He lifted his arm and drew her closer, nestled against his side. “It is never a wasted effort.”

“Solas? How did this all start?” She leaned back a little so she could see his face. He was staring out into the dark, expression hard. She'd put off asking this for months on end. But she had a feeling she needed to have answers now. If she was going to trust her gut, unreliable as it was, it was saying that whatever had happened *then* was the root cause of all that had happened *since*. “When you talk about 'the war', you never say it was won. You, with your careful manipulation of the truth. You say 'when the war ended', not that it was won or lost.”

“What do you know of the history of it?”

“Oof, a variety of things.” She ticked them off on her fingers. “The legends say that Elgar'nan fought the sun and buried it in the Abyss. There are references to Mythal killing a Titan. That the power and arrogance of that act unleashed a horror that would destroy the world, the Blight, I'm assuming. Andruil made weapons and armor of the Void, but it drove her mad and finally the knowledge of the Void's location had to be taken from her. That was the body, right? And then you rebelled after Mythal's murder, tricking both the Evanuris and the Forgotten Ones in their respective prisons before making the Veil.”

He sighed, a deep exhalation that made his chest seem hollow from it. He still didn't look at her, still stared out into the dark without seeing it. “It wasn't the sun that Elgar'nan buried. But it was a fiery creature, a primordial beast.”

“You mean a dragon?”

“Or something like it. It was defeated but not dead. The earth could not hold it and it escaped. But it had bled. Mythal gathered its blood into a well and shortly after, the Titans woke.”

“And they made the dwarves, didn't they? That's why dwarves don't dream. They have no connection to the Fade because they are made of the earth itself, the severed arm of a once mighty beast. Wasn't the arm though, was it? Hard to breathe life into a race without brains.”

He finally allowed a smirk to cross his face and his head swiveled to meet hers. “Why do you ask these things if you already know the answers?”

“Because I've always just guessed. Asking is confirmation from someone who was there.”

“I was not there,” he contradicted. “This was a time before the world was as...structured, I suppose. The elements were malleable, as was life. I have heard the tale of Mythal walking fully formed from the sea to calm Elgar'nan's wrath. She was a spirit, as we all were once. She...coalesced into

the being finally known as the All-Mother at the same time she gathered up the primordial blood. *I* did not take on sentience as a spirit for many years after that. Centuries. Not until she asked for wisdom and guidance. I was never involved in the decisions she made from my advice until I took on a body.”

“When *she* was in over her head,” Carly said, rather sourly. Solas cocked an eyebrow at the tone but nodded just the same. “So how did war between Titans and elves start?”

“The Titans were unlike any being the Evanuris had met before. There were misunderstandings. Legend and myth remember them as pillars of the earth, and so they are, the bedrock upon which all of Thedas rests. Until they were touched by the primordial blood, they slept, content to carry the world without care or design. The blood changed them, woke them. But they were too large to communicate. Dwarves were a conduit, at first nothing more than constructs capable of speech between our races. Elgar'nán thought them...”

“Inferior.”

“A soulless representative,” he clarified. “Unworthy of his time. He was insulted.”

“So he fought them, dragging the rest into his conflict because, yay solidarity.”

He nodded. “And in the battles that followed, the dwarves were better made, with more individuality and free will. Over the course of thousands of years they evolved in order to defend the earth better. Until they became the race you know today.”

“How did the war end?”

“The one Mythal killed had unleashed the Blight, a warning of which the Evanuris had not heeded. Both sides withdrew, agreed that until the Blight was contained, there would be no more fighting.”

“But it never was.”

“Oh, it was. A vessel was made of the earth to contain it until it could be neutralized. There was peace between races then, and a great civilization grew from the Children of the Stone.”

“The Primeval Thaig,” she mused. That was probably also when the elves acknowledged dwarves as intelligent beings and recorded their existence in their archives. Something else occurred to her. “The Dalish legends say Andruil hunted the Forgotten Ones in the Void. What does that even mean?”

“There were a number of the People who felt that the Evanuris had toyed with a power they did not understand and they would not stand with them against the earth itself. In turn, the Evanuris cast them out, striking their names from records and branding them as traitors. They hid, arming themselves as Andruil had from the Titan's blood. They discovered a way to remove the body from the earth, hiding it in the Fade. She was incensed. She had inherited a great deal of Elgar'nán's jealousy.”

“Hiding it in the Fade, that sounds rather familiar. Did you help? The legends say you played both sides against the middle.”

He nodded. “I assisted the Forgotten Ones, told them where to hide, how to escape notice, how to protect themselves. I counseled temperance to Andruil, although she rarely listened. In the end, the Evanuris became divided over it. Their constant infighting was detrimental to all. Whole swathes of land were rendered untenable because of it.”

“And then humans arrived in the middle of all this and threw a monkey wrench into the works, bringing in a new, rapidly expanding faction.”

“Yes. A battle for supremacy of the earth would have ended only in the utter and complete annihilation of it. Humans thirst for knowledge too. And what they do not understand, they willfully destroy. Mythal and the dwarven leaders agreed that knowledge of the Titans would be purged to prevent this. She paid for that decision with her life.” Carly knew the rest of that side of the story. Rebellion and the Veil. The desperate act of a loyal soldier to carry out the final wish of his beloved leader. “When the Old Gods of Tevinter whispered in men's ears, their focus was not on the Titans, but on what they could be exploited for.” He made a chiding sound, aimed at himself. “I never intended to trap the Forgotten Ones, the Veil took away their escape from the Fade.”

“What *are* the Old Gods?”

“Thought given form, able to reach across the Veil into the minds of men through their dreams, teaching them things they misconstrued into blood magic.”

“So they're spirits?”

“Yes.”

“But why do they rise as dragons when they become Archdemons? And what even are darkspawn?”

“Lyrium has a song, you know this?” She nodded. “The Blight is a perverted version of it, and darkspawn are the effect of that perversion on flesh, seeking always to replicate. Dragons are the expected visage of the gods.”

“Spirits shape themselves to our expectations,” she murmured, remembering. She shuddered. “This world is nuts, you know that? Nothing even remotely like this is possible in my world.”

“I cannot tell if that is good or bad.”

“Probably good, to be honest.” She took a deep breath. “All right, enough heavy talk. We need to get some rest. Tomorrow will bring all new fun and exciting challenges we need to be ready for.” She stood up and brushed herself off, and he did the same. “Thank you for telling me, Solas. It...puts a lot of things into perspective for me.”

“Da'banal, vhenan.”

The Wrath of a God

Chapter Notes

11/6/20

Y'all, I don't know what to say. 20K hits...

showers you all with love Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A ball of blue light shot out from the hanging heart shaped stone. Knowing what was coming, Carly no longer thought of it as the actual heart of the Titan, but the imagery still stuck. Certainly it was *some* effect of the sleeping earth, since it was how Valta formed her connection to it. Carly turned and watched it slam into her, throwing the dwarf backwards. Renn shouted and tried to run to her. Carly grabbed him before the wall of rock cut them off from her.

“She'll be fine, Renn,” she said. He looked up at her, tattooed face crumpling with both rage and fear. “I promise you.”

“How do you know?” he demanded.

“The same way I knew to save your life when we first met the Sha-Brytol.”

He frowned at her, the words sinking in. “What *are* you?”

“I'm here to help.” She let him go and watched the stones roll across the enclosed space, forming the rock guardian. She unlatched the wolf pelf from her shoulders and let it drop to the ground, knowing it would just slow her down during the fight. She kept her bow in her hands and looked across the space to where Solas, Cole and Thom were standing. “This is the big fight, boys. Don't let me down.”

Solas smirked and rolled his staff off his shoulder with a little more flourish than strictly necessary. She spared him a grin as his barrier floated down over her. This fight would be interesting now with him so much stronger. Granted, turning stone into stone wouldn't do much. But he had other abilities.

The guardian roared a challenge at them and they all dropped into defensive stances. It was hard to keep her distance as the lyrium powered arms swept out from the rock and it took all her concentration to leap and dodge. She got off maybe one shot in ten from what she normally could. But she'd known this was coming; she brought all explosive arrows. Around her the swirl of Solas's magic flowed, barraging the construct with spells she recognized as stone fist and a version of mind blast that didn't seem to be affecting the others. Cole was a darting flash of smoke here and there, engaged in the deadly dance he did so well. Thom, of course, had gone into full fury mode, hacking and slashing at the guardian with his shield taking the brunt of its attacks. Already she could see a crack in it. Renn was beside him, hurling dwarven insults and curses at the top of his lungs.

She'd spent too much time watching the others and the swing of the guardian's arm caught her flat

footed. The impact knocked the wind out of her, shards of stone and lyrium piercing the Sentinel armor all over her torso. If she'd been wearing her usual prowler kit, she'd be dead. Adrenaline kicked into her system, along with a surge of some manic feeling from the lyrium. She shouted and raised the Anchor, letting the mark flow out of her in a concentrated wave of Fade energy.

Her shout turned to a scream through her teeth as pain wracked her arm on top of the injuries from the guardian. The ball of rift energy hovered over it, drawing up what passed for its life force into it, reacting with the lyrium into a spectacular explosion. It wasn't enough, and the construct began to rebuild itself. But she didn't see it. She fell to the ground, unaware of anything other than the sudden appearance of Solas's legs in front of her face. The barrier he cast on her was different from the others, almost as tangible as a ward. There was something like a sonic boom in reverse, a sucking in of noise rather than a release of it. Then everything went black.

She heard voices before she was able to open her eyes. She'd read somewhere once that hearing was the first sense to be regained after being unconscious. The voices were arguing.

“By the Stone, what exactly has happened here!” That was Renn, still raging. If they had breath to spare for shouting, she figured the fight must be over.

“Renn...” That was Valta, her voice soft and pleading and just a touch absent, as if she was only paying half her attention to the conversation at hand. Which was likely after what she'd been through and what she was now connected to.

“No, I need answers.”

“They will come, Child of the Stone,” Solas said calmly.

“And you! What did you do?”

“Surely you knew I was a mage.” From wherever she was, Carly could hear the sardonic tone in his voice. No secrets would be let out today.

“I have seen mages my whole time with the Legion. Not one of them could cast a spell like that.”

“I am not like Grey Wardens.” Carly mentally snorted. *That* was putting it mildly.

“Pondering, pride in her pride....” That was Cole, and much nearer than the others. “Solas, she is waking.”

There was additional sputtering from Renn, quickly cut off by what she could imagine was Solas's expression. She heard the sound of grit under feet and was finally able to open her eyes in time to see him kneel down next to her. She realized then that her head was cushioned by the wolf pelt and she was still right where she'd fallen.

“Thank you, Cole,” Solas murmured to the spirit as he checked her over. His eyes when they met hers were the same silvery blue as always, but she saw something lurking in them like shadows. The aftereffect of using his power.

“You...you didn't kill'im...did you?” she gasped out. One side of his mouth quirked up and he shook his head.

“No, but I did presumably use more force on the lyrium construct than he expected.”

“Went all...wrath of god...on it?” It was hard to breathe and she hurt everywhere.

“One could say that. It might have exploded further.”

She couldn't dredge up a laugh, but she smiled. His hand enclosed hers, his fingers tight. “Need to stop...doing that...where people can...see.”

“You need to stop throwing yourself directly in the line of deadly danger, whenan.”

“Had this...talk...before.”

“Hmm.” A wave of magic flowed over her at his hum, something light and filled with the feeling of a cool breeze. It felt strange, like she was a loose jumble of puzzle pieces snapping back into a whole. When he was done, she could breathe easier. “You will live. But you need rest.”

She breathed slow and deep, letting the rise and fall of her chest assess her pain elsewhere. Twinges remained, but he was good at what he did, and she was probably as fit as she was going to get without extended sleep. “Rainier?”

“He was struck by the explosion. He is fine. His wounds were not as serious as yours. I have already healed you several times, but it would not take until we got all the lyrium out. It kept negating my magic while simultaneously poisoning you.”

“That sounds...awful.”

“Thankfully, you were asleep for it. Now, sleep again, Carly. We will make camp here for the time being. It is safe.” His fingers traced along her hairline and he hummed under his breath. He'd done that once before, she recalled, when she'd escaped the ruins of Haven. The sudden feeling of being pulled under a blanket of warmth told her that what she'd suspected then was true – he was using magic to make her sleep. She didn't fight it.

The next time she woke, she opened her eyes to the seemingly endless vista of the underground sky. She was propped up against their travel packs, wrapped tightly in her wolf pelt. Valta sat next to her, humming tunelessly as she traced patterns in the grit.

“Hey, Shaper, how you feeling?” Carly asked, realizing that her voice was scratchy. How long had she been out?

“Greetings, Inquisitor. I am well. And you are much better.”

“Guess I'll live, then.” She turned her head and looked to where the guardian had been, where the wellspring had been. It was gone, an empty swathe of stone. Even the lyrium shards were gone. “What did I miss?”

Valta smiled. “I get the feeling you don't need telling.”

There was an undertone to her words, to her voice. The Titan. She wondered just how much the connection had told the dwarf. For that matter, how much did the Titan know and understand of what had happened to the world? Did it recognize her as *other* or as elf?

“The Titan sleeps?”

“Yes. There is so much now to learn and explore. I'll be staying.”

“And Renn?”

“He is...undecided.”

“You need to tell him that you love him, Valta. You should always tell the people you love that you love them. Never waste the moments. They may never come again.”

Valta looked at her, her eyes more knowing than they'd been before. “You saved his life. Why?”

“Because his death was needless. I thought for a moment that perhaps I'd done the wrong thing, but we're all still here, right where we should be.”

“Thank you, Inquisitor. For all your mysteries. I will enjoy pondering them.”

“You're welcome, Shaper Valta.” Carly looked back out at the view. The air was fresh and cool, like a spring morning. She could hear water flowing somewhere and there were even flocks of birds below in the miraculous trees. “If nothing else, Orzammar should know what happened to you both.”

“Tell them...we were separated. You don't know what became of us.”

“Are you sure? You were dismayed that this knowledge had been lost. You want it to remain that way?”

“It is better, for now. It was agreed upon, and I will not be the one to break that agreement.”

“Fair enough.”

They left the Wellspring two days later. Carly was still fairly weak, but the passage back to the Inquisition camp was clear and they could take their time. She rested on the floor of the elevator as it rose up from the depths, Solas holding her steady in his arms while Cole and Thom stood by.

“Strange days,” the warrior said.

“It's a curse, ya know?” she said. “May you live in interesting times'. I would happily live through some boring ones now.” She tilted her head back to see Solas. “Can we do that for a while? Live boringly?”

“I believe so, vhenan. For a while.”

They finally stumbled into the Inquisition camp a full five days after leaving the Wellspring. The camp was filled with the rest of Renn's company from the Legion of the Dead. Carly smiled at Scout Harding in the center of the group and waited for her to say it.

“She *always* comes back. Pay up, Salroka.”

Chapter End Notes

And that's it, that's the last bit that bears resemblance to canon. Okay, I'm lying a little bit. There's still hints of canon, but for the most part, from here on out, it's all from my head.

The Blood of Titans

Chapter Notes

11/10/20

Some filler on the passage of time. I hope it all makes sense.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The summer and fall of 9:43 passed quickly into the winter of 9:44.

Varric and Hawke went back to Kirkwall. She missed having them around, but they corresponded enough that it wasn't as hard as she'd anticipated.

Vivienne departed, going back to Val Royeaux with those mages who wanted a more normal life, escorted by a large portion of Inquisition troops. Leliana had been elected Divine, as Carly hoped. The Circle of Magi was abolished to be rebuilt as the *College* of Magi, with less repression and more autonomy than ever before. There were still tense moments and the occasional misstep, but overall there was structure again. There wasn't much work left to be done in terms of reconstruction, and peace – surprisingly – held in Orlais. Carly began to think it was time to consider disbanding voluntarily before any Exalted Council could demand it.

She turned over stewardship of Caer Bronach to Ferelden, although her scouts remained on site with Alistair and Anora's permission. The same was true in the Western Approach, where Orlesian lords bickered over Griffon Wing Keep, finally allowing Knight-Captain Rylen to keep his men there under the auspices of Orlesian supervision. But she kept Suledin Keep in Inquisition control. It was a ruin to human eyes and the only elves who knew it functionally wasn't were her and Solas. It was a central staging point for traders and armies alike between points east and Val Royeaux. And having reclaimed it, Carly was in no rush to give it up, if for no other reason than preservation. In the back of her mind was Solas's offhand suggestion about asking for the Dales back. She hadn't forgotten it.

Dorian had gone back to Tevinter, eager to begin his campaign against the corruption of the Magisterium with Maeveris. He would be back, however. Bull and the Chargers had stopped in to Skyhold, coming off some mercenary work for Josephine in Antiva. They planned to stay for the rest of the winter, and Dorian was 'coincidentally' coming to visit. She made sure the two of them would have a whole suite to themselves in the guest wing.

Cassandra was off somewhere rebuilding the Seekers. She sent regular letters, each one more hopeful than the last. She had recently started asking for personal advice and Carly wondered if the taciturn woman had finally found someone to turn her head. Thom had gone with her, and trained her new recruits in sword and shield. He'd earned back a measure of the respect he'd lost with his continued loyalty to the Inquisition. Her ambassador had remained in Skyhold, and she knew from her weekly meetings that he and Josie still wrote to each other, although no longer in a romantic manner.

Cullen had remained too, with the bulk of the soldiers. Mostly these days they were escorts for scouts and runners. She was still the Inquisitor, but many of the things people wanted her for could be delegated. He seemed happy enough, and at peace for the first time in his adult life.

Sera stayed, although she was often gone on Red Jenny business. She kept track of the littles for Carly, who in turn supported her fledgling relationship with Dagna. Cole came and went at will, gone for long periods of time until he wished to rest. She usually knew he was back when flowers began appearing in random places around the keep. Or cheese wheels. Sometimes it was fruit on windowsills.

The Sentinels turned Skyhold into a home for themselves, guarding their wolves. She walked often with Abelas in the garden, where they talked of things both old and new. He had relaxed in her company, and she sought his advice on things she couldn't talk about with Solas. He did, in fact, teach her to read elvish script, and improved her facility with the language.

As for Solas himself...

Well, when he wasn't off traveling to recruit elves from far flung places or visiting his as yet unknown strongholds, he was in his laboratory in the hidden library.

The first few months were spent putting together the memory shards he'd collected. The following month had been deciphering their data after seemingly just *absorbing* it. That was when he'd asked for some lyrium from Dagna, raw and unprocessed. Carly didn't see him for two days straight after that.

But it was his next request that had made her truly worried.

Red lyrium.

Carly carried the lead bound case of slivers to him herself. "Are you certain you...?"

"Yes," he said shortly, still hunched over some diagram he'd drawn out in his precise handwriting. She couldn't begin to follow it. He held out one hand in a peremptory gesture and she took a step back.

"Fen'Harel, look at me."

His head shot up and he frowned at her, eyes wild. If he'd had hair it might have been standing on end from him running his hands through it. She arched an eyebrow at him and waited until the crazed look subsided. He took a deep breath and sat up straight, his face more composed.

"Vhenan..."

"Tell me that you need this for research and not for power. Swear it to me so that I believe you."

He laid down his writing stylus and stood up from the desk. His hands cupped hers around the lead box. "Emma lath, I swear to you, I am not going to use this red lyrium for power. I am trying to mend it."

"Mend it?"

"Red lyrium carries the Blight, yes?" She nodded. "I am trying to find a way to reverse it, to eradicate the Blight from it."

"And then what will you do?"

He smiled. "If I am successful, I will apply the same procedure to the land." She let out a breath

that was supposed to contain words, but none came. His hands supported hers when she went slack. She released the box to him without realizing it. He set it down carefully on the desk and returned to her. "Ghilan'nain's notes contained the sequences she used to make it self replicating. Sylaise's notes were much more scattered, but I was able to put together a series of equations that should allow me to force the Blight to break down like a natural process."

"You mean...like decay or digestion or something?"

"Yes." He took her hands in his again. "I needed raw, healthy lyrium in order to understand its structure. Now I need red lyrium to see if my calculations are correct."

"How confident are you?"

If anything, his smile grew wider. Proud. "Reasonably."

"I...I guess I'll let you get to it, then."

He pressed a kiss to her forehead and watched her walk out of the hidden library in a daze. She closed the door behind her.

It took him another few weeks, but finally he approached her where she sat with Josephine idly going through the current requests for her time and enjoying an afternoon snack between them. He stopped a few feet away from them and cleared his throat to get their attention.

"Solas?"

"Would you like to see? And you as well, Lady Montilyet?"

Carly scrambled to get up and follow him down to the library laboratory, Josie on her heels. Solas stopped them outside the door and cast a barrier on each of them. It felt different to her, heavier, almost palpable like a layer of cloth rather than energy. She gave him a questioning look.

"Due precaution, vhenan. It *is* lyrium after all."

He opened the door and immediately Carly felt like her mind was being assaulted by discordant music. She couldn't imagine what Josephine was feeling, but it looked like her Ambassador was trying to stifle a scream. Solas held up a crystal of red lyrium in the pincer grip of tongs and his eyes flashed. Josie jumped; evidently she hadn't seen him do that trick yet. The lyrium's song felt like it was dragging jagged teeth over her nerves, the cacophony of it rattling her brain. It *stretched*, almost shrieking and then all at once the shard blew off a layer like ash. The crystal was blue, and the song was gone, replaced with a nearly silent hum.

"You did it," she said.

"Forgive me," Josephine said, "but what did I just see?"

He led them back out of the room, away from the remaining pieces Carly could feel were there. The barrier around them slid off and she reflexively shivered. "I removed the taint of the Blight from the lyrium and rendered it into its natural form."

"With...magic?" Josie's eyes were wide and almost disbelieving. Solas smiled.

"Yes, with magic. Very old magic."

Josephine shook herself. “I think it would be better if we did not speak of this to anyone. It is...too big.”

“I agree,” Carly said. She turned to Solas. “So what's next?”

He looked tired but jubilant. This had been a challenge for him, one he'd only reluctantly taken on. She knew his plans had never included actually curing the Blight, merely containing it once more. He took her hand in his and laid a kiss on her knuckles. “Next, my love, I must test a larger subject. It is time.”

The idol. She had not once forgotten he had it in his possession, although she didn't know its location. He had promised not to bring it to Skyhold, and he hadn't.

Josephine looked between the two of them and excused herself back to her work. Carly and Solas went to their chamber where he drew her against him on the sofa. Her third winter in Thedas was hitting hard and she noticed someone had already laid a tidy fire in the fireplace, along with a hefty stack of wood on the hearth to keep the chamber warm.

“Do I want to know where it is?”

He chuckled beneath her ear where she rested on his chest. “The last place anyone would look. Back where it belongs.”

“The Primeval Thaig? How...I thought Bianca had locked up the entrance to that.”

“The Evanuris built it in partnership with the dwarves, Carly. Do you think I would not know how to enter it?”

“Okay...fair point.” She dug her fingers into his sweater – something he had yet to forego wearing around the keep – and ignored the buzzing ache in the Anchor that the red lyrium had sparked.

“How long will you be gone?”

“I am not certain,” he murmured into her hair. “I will keep you informed. It should not be long.”

“Back to Fade dates, eh?”

He chuckled again. “I will find you there.”

“You better. C'mere.” She leaned up and tugged on his chin until he lowered his head to meet her kiss. If their touches grew desperate, their hands hard and grasping, their breaths shaking, neither said a word. They never made it to the bed, although at some point they rolled off the sofa and onto the hard floor. They paid no attention.

When she had called out his name on a breathless cry enough times to satisfy him, he finally cradled her in her arms, carrying her across the chamber and tucking them together under the covers. She slept deeply enough that she did not dream.

And when she woke in the morning, he was already on his way.

Chapter End Notes

Before anyone gets nervous that he'll disappear...he won't. He'll always come back to

her.

Var Lath Vir Suledin**

Chapter Notes

11/13/20

Happy Friday the 13th. Have some NSFW.

The Crossroads looked as it always did, a never ending field of towering mirrors. And as always, he knew exactly where he wanted to go. She wondered how that worked. "Solas, where are we going?"

He pressed a quick kiss to her forehead and whispered, "What is it you always say? Spoilers."

He had returned at last, triumphant, from his trip to the Deep Roads. She knew it wouldn't be long before he enacted the next part of his plan. The one that would finally take the Anchor from her. She tried not to think too hard about that as she followed him.

He stopped at a mirror that looked just like all the others to her. He was wearing her favorite smirk. "After you, vhenan."

She stepped through the Eluvian and emerged into a courtyard she knew well. Too well. He came out behind her and smiled at her shock. "Solas...this is the Elven Ruins."

"I am aware of that."

"But..." She turned back to the gateway they'd crossed. It looked identical to the one portrayed in the game. "But, the only way here that I knew about started from a Qunari stronghold."

"That is because they have control of the main passage. I need to start working on getting those back into my hands."

"Yeah, you do," she agreed absently, looking around the sunny glade, strange looking without being filled with Qunari statues. "If it stays to the timeline I know, we have less than a year before they try to invade. So...why are we here?"

He laughed, carefree and joyful. She'd never get used to that sound. "I thought you would like to see it."

"I'm not going to fall down any sudden holes am I? This place is...how does it even stay up?"

"Magic," he whispered, leaning down to kiss the tip of her ear. "Go on, explore. And no, you will not fall. I would not allow that."

She ran around the courtyard, seeing it from angles she never got to in the game. It wasn't really a courtyard at all, she realized, it was the keep itself, roofless and half eroded into the surroundings. The Eluvian stood at the back of it, probably once in a place of high traffic, and she knew there was another one up the stairs, probably originally in a tower. That one led somewhere only Solas knew now. Tall guardian statues stood around, eternally watching over the ancient place. She went up the stairs, and found what she was looking for.

“Hello, Fen'Harel,” she murmured to the baying stone wolf and placed her hand on it. It was warm from the sun. She heard Solas's footsteps coming up behind her and leaned her shoulder on the statue, looking him over as he climbed the final steps. He walked differently here, more at home in his skin. “The real thing is better.”

“The ruins or the god?” he asked, head cocked to the side, a devilish glint in his eyes. She laughed; he almost never gave in and referenced himself as a deity. Much less with any sense of humor about it.

“Both,” she said and reached out for him. He happily stepped into her embrace. His lips were warm on hers, and he deepened the kiss, slanting his mouth across hers. Warm stone at her back, warm man at her front. She pulled him closer, her arms around his neck.

“You appear to be enjoying my surprise,” he said when he pulled away from kissing her.

“I am. I love it. I love *you*, ma fen.”

He smiled and maneuvered her around so her back was against the stone wolf, then hoisted her legs up around him. She yelped, always unprepared for when he turned this playful. It never seemed to be in his nature, for all that he was known as a trickster. Then again, lately he'd rarely been in a mood to be like this. It was like a great weight had lifted from him with his success. Either that or he was fighting off a greater one with distraction.

He kissed her again, deep, drugging kisses that left her mind blank and her body breathless. He held her securely in his arms and she tightened her legs around him, smiling at his needy growl. It sparked a need of her own and she bit her lip, waiting to see what he was going to do next. She loved it when he took charge.

He smiled, as if he'd heard that and leaned back enough to swiftly unbutton the plain fitted top she had thrown on that morning. It had been her plan to work in the garden, clearing up what little debris accumulated with the winter, but a chance to be swept away by him was never to be denied. His hands slid against her skin, warm and calloused and her breath hitched. He kissed her again, sweet and yet passionate, before nudging her head to the side to reach her neck. His teeth found their usual home in her skin and she shivered at the quick prickle of pain before he soothed it as he always did, sipping kisses that made her melt.

“The things I would spend ages doing to you, vhenan,” he whispered in her ear, and she shivered again at the promise in his voice. It never failed.

“Like what?” she urged. His hands slid down her body, coming to rest under her ass. He squeezed and grinned at her at the same time.

“Perhaps I would rather show you.”

He stepped back enough that her legs fell from around his waist. He didn't let her stumble, but he also didn't let her go, keeping her back against the statue. His thumbs dipped into the waistband of her leather breeches and he had a look in his eye she recognized as the 'superior elf' look. Usually it drove her mad, but right now...right now it was driving her mad another way.

“Loosen them,” he ordered.

She dropped her hands to the laces and pulled them harder than she probably needed to, but there was no arguing with that tone, especially with that look in his eye. Once the leathers sagged on her hips, he pushed them down, taking her smalls with them. He knelt at her feet, drawing each leg

from them as well as her soft boots. When he stood up again, he kissed her once more, lifting first one then the other leg around him until she was back to being braced between the statue and the man.

“Solas...?”

“Am I making you nervous?” he asked, sincerity evident even though he still wore a look of pure dominance.

“No...not exactly. But...here?”

“*Here*,” he breathed. After how he'd reclaimed a bit of his own soul with her at Suledin Keep she wasn't going to argue with him. And certainly it wasn't like they'd be interrupted. Maybe that's why he brought her here instead of going up to their chamber.

He pressed against her and she could feel his erection through his clothes. There was something supremely arousing in that. She, half naked and open, he, still clothed and in control. He drew her arms around his neck, and she knew without asking that he wanted her to hold herself up on him. He braced one hand against the stone and snaked the other between them, tugging the laces of his breeches and incidentally rubbing against her as he did it. He smiled when she whimpered, and slid his knuckles more slowly against her folds, already slippery.

“So wet, vhenan. I should have done this sooner.”

“Shush,” she managed, face burning. “You've been gone awhile.”

He kissed the roses in her cheeks with playful lightness at the same time she could feel his cock slap against her, freed from the confines of his clothes. She sucked in a breath and nearly bobbed her head on him. The hand he'd been using to lean on the wolf statue automatically shifted to under her leg, holding her in place.

He pushed into her, sliding slow and torturous, his eyes on hers. The both moaned when his hips met hers, and he flexed inside her. She urged him on with small sounds and the press of her legs around him. He gave gladly, not so much stroking as pulsing inside her. It wasn't long before she was breathless and hanging onto the edge of climax, but he didn't let her drop off it for a long time. Her patience began to unravel, her cries growing more desperate as she strained for completion, and he still had the same expression on his face, equal parts smug and mischievous.

“Please...” she begged, clawing at his back, her legs tight around him until they burned with effort. “God, please...”

He drew back, the withdrawn inches of his length sliding out of her with a slick sound before he pushed back in. She gasped, wordless. He did it again and again, each time sending jolts of white hot pleasure up her spine. She couldn't breathe now, she was so close. It *burned*, she was so close. He pressed deep and captured her mouth with his, his teeth on her lower lip and she fell, a shout escaping her throat, raw and loud. Her body pulsed around him and she couldn't even feel the stone at her back with the overload of sensation racing through her limbs. He stayed buried deep, and she could feel a different kind of spasm as he finished inside her.

“Sweet Jesus,” she whispered.

“Good?”

“You will be the death of me someday.”

He withdrew from her with a messy flood and chuckled. "Only the little ones, remember?"

"That wasn't so little."

"I know." He let her legs drop back to the ground and held her tight, kissing her sweetly, his grin entirely too self-satisfied. She wanted to swat at him, only she didn't have the energy.

And then her hand betrayed her. Sparks erupted from the Anchor and she stifled a cry as the pain raced up her arm. It was so sudden she was caught off guard. She barely felt Solas cover her hand with his, but from her periphery she saw his eyes flash. The pain subsided. His posture changed in an instant, from basking to concerned.

"How long has it been doing this?"

"A while."

He dropped a kiss on the slash in her palm, but his eyes were hard. "How long, vhenan."

"The first time was just after you cured the lyrium in the lab," she sighed. His grip tightened on her hand until it was almost painful, but then he released her.

"It is time to take the Anchor," he said.

"I know. I'm surprised you didn't do it sooner."

"I wanted to hold it in reserve," he said gently, smoothing back her hair and tucking the loose locks behind her ear. He almost smiled. "And I have become accustomed to having you in my head."

His greatest fear, to die alone. His gasp was quiet but it reverberated through her like a lance.

"Ma fen, even if you can't hear my thoughts, you won't be alone. You know that." She looked up at him, wrapped her arms around his neck to bring him closer still. "No turning back, remember? No leaving. You'll never be alone as long as you have me. Forever."

He rested his forehead against hers. "Come, vhenan, we should return. I am not certain I can do this without causing you pain, and I would have you be as comfortable as you can be."

He looked so distraught she couldn't stand it. "Hey. I love you, you know that? I love you so much it makes me feel like I can't contain it. Nothing is going to change that. Nothing."

He tipped up her chin and kissed her hard enough that she forgot she was still standing there half naked, and when he let her go the despair had faded in his eyes. He nodded once and helped her dress. She gave one last look around the ruins before they stepped back through the Eluvian.

I will never forget you.

Queen's Gambit

Chapter Notes

11/17/20

Chess metaphors? In my fanfic? It's more likely than you think.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It turned out that they were unable to immediately deal with the Anchor. Upon arriving back at Skyhold, they were greeted by a smirking Tevinter mage and his hulking Qunari partner.

“What do you think, kadan? Does the Inquisitor look...disheveled to you?”

“You know, amatus, I do believe she does.”

She rushed to hug Dorian tight before she turned and squeezed into Bull's arms too. “How long have you been here? How did you even get through the pass? The snow blocked it weeks ago.”

“An hour or so,” Dorian said. “Our hosts seemed to have vanished and there was no one to meet us but that frightfully dour Sentinel.”

“I hope you were polite to Abelas, Dorian,” she said mock severely.

“I was the pinnacle of manners and etiquette, my dear.”

“And we got through the pass by him melting it,” Bull said, only shuddering slightly. Years of being with a mage hadn't erased *all* his fears of magic.

Carly snorted and looked at Solas. He was enjoying their reunion but she saw a haze of inattention in his eyes. She put a hand on his arm. “How about after we get them settled in and have eaten a good meal and relaxed for a bit, all right? It's not going to fall off between now and then.”

He nodded and left the trio in the garden while he took himself off towards the kitchens. She fully expected that he and Misyl would have something concocted between them by the time the rest of them reached the Great Hall.

“What isn't going to fall off, Boss?” Bull asked as they meandered through the keep. Leave it to Bull to catch the tone of that.

“Oh, just some trouble with the Anchor. It's getting...unstable.”

Dorian caught her arm before she could head up the stairs to the Great Hall. “Are you all right?”

“I'll be fine, Dorian, stop worrying.” She smiled and shook her head at him. She *would* be all right. She had to be. “Now, tell me how long you're going to be here. I'm hoping for a nice long visit, assuming you two can keep your hands off each other long enough to be sociable.”

Dorian made a choked noise but Bull laughed. Sufficiently distracted from any further talk about her hand, she led them into the Hall and sat them down near the fireplace. And when Solas joined

them some time later, bearing a tray heaped with food, she knew she was right that he'd gotten Misyl to make something special.

Carly cleared her desk, pulled up another chair to it and laid down the board, arranging the pieces neatly as Solas came up the stairs, his face furrowed in thought. She waited for him to notice but he just absently stared into the fire in their chambers. She cleared her throat to get his attention and that failed too.

“Yo, Earth to Fen'Harel,” she called, arching an eyebrow at him when he finally turned. “Come play,” she added in a softer tone. “We haven't in a long time.”

He came over and sat in the chair she offered and gave her a look when he saw that she'd set up the board so he had to go first. “If I recall, I beat *you* the last time we played.”

“You wanna wrestle over it?”

He let a small smile slip and moved his first pawn, just as he always did. “If we wrestled, vhenan, I doubt either of us would be in any mood to play chess afterwards.”

She moved her knight, grinning with impish glee at his frown. He was as bad as Bull about that move. “Might still be worth it.”

They each moved pieces, tangling themselves into quite a set of traps that of course neither fell for. She was much better than she'd been a year ago, and she knew how his mind worked. Leading him on a chase for her queen was trickier than it was with Bull, however. Or Cullen, for that matter. Too militant, both of them. Solas, on the other hand, made great use of the 'lesser' pieces, boxing her into corners and making her choose between sacrifices again and again.

“Is everything set?” she asked when they'd done nothing but make moves and think them over for a good twenty minutes.

“Yes,” he said softly, musing on the pieces although it was obvious to her that he wasn't really paying attention to them. He took a breath and looked at her, bringing himself back to the present. “Tomorrow, I shall depart.”

“For...? Hey, you just got home.” She gave him a pout and he sighed.

“I know. There are a number of items I still require, and there are other tests I must run. After that, I will likely go straight to Kirkwall.”

“Why Kirkwall?” He looked at her sharply, a challenge in his eyes. Evidently he thought this was something she could figure out on her own. So she thought about it, listing off the things in that area that might draw him.

Deep Roads access.

Bone Pit.

Sundermount.

“Sundermount?” she asked aloud, startling herself. The click of Solas moving a pawn on the board seemed very loud. He nodded. “Why there? Because the Veil has already been breached in that spot?”

“Indeed.” He sat back, waiting for her to make her move. “It is weakest there, and less likely to cause undue ripples ahead of schedule. If there are rifts you will not be able to do anything about them once I have the Anchor myself. It is best to minimize the possibility.”

“So you really are going to enter the Fade. Still planning to rewrite the world?”

“Not at this time, no.” He rubbed his chin while he contemplated what she'd done to the board. He reached for his next piece slowly, still looking over his options. “This will be an assault upon the Black City.”

“You always did say you had plans for dealing with the Evanuris.”

“I always did.” He made his move and released it. “Flemeth will be joining me in the near future. As the host of Mythal, she has a stake in this endeavor.”

“So I take it you'll be gone a while.”

“Regrettably, yes.”

“Can I...?”

“What is on your mind, vhenan?”

“How did you get them there? The Evanuris, I mean?”

He contemplated the board for a long moment before he looked up at her. “There were already Eluvians in place, of course. The Vir Ghil'an that stood in this spot was well trafficked by those who lived in the south. Detaching them from the Crossroads while simultaneously rerouting them to a dead space merely required timing.”

“It was getting them all to show up?”

“Yes.”

“*You* were the alleged great weapon,” she said, putting the legend into perspective.

“I acted as my own bait,” he said in agreement, making his move, “tying a piece of my magic to the Eluvians so they could not fail to notice its signature, and once they were within them, sealing them shut was not difficult. The Blight had made them all more powerful than they had been before, and I had little time to act. I could not have survived even a single combat directly with them.”

“And thus the need to remove the entire structure and imprison it whole.”

“Yes.”

She moved her queen, blocking his attack. It was ultimately futile; he'd won the game. Now it was either just attrition on her part, or the choice to let him take her king and end it. She didn't have enough room left to try to find a stalemate. She resolutely did not think about the irony there. He frowned at the board, as if he realized she'd moved her queen on purpose rather than one of her few remaining pawns. The look he gave her across the desk was pained. It seemed he'd caught the irony rather quickly.

“Don't look at me in that tone of face, ma fen. We both know what's coming. You've won the game.”

“Carly...”

“What did I say?”

He didn't reply and took her queen with his, protected by a bishop – a mage, she thought, remembering how he called it in her version of things – and put her in checkmate. As if on cue, her hand sparked and she hissed. The pain was intense, making her fingers spasm and flex until they felt like they would break. She barely heard the scrape of Solas's chair as he came around the desk, cradling her arm in his hand, his eyes flashing to control his magic running wild under her skin. The flare up passed and she leaned on him, panting.

“No more delays, vhenan. It is time.”

“I know.”

He pulled her up from her seat and they went to the fireplace, sliding onto the sofa facing each other since he hadn't let go of her hand. He traced the mark in her palm, now an angry spiderweb of green tendrils racing down her fingers and up her arm. His whole face drooped. “I waited too long. I should have done this as soon as the Breach was closed.”

“You would have outed yourself.”

He looked at her, his eyes so sad she couldn't bear it. He shook his head. “I do not know if I can take this gently.”

She leaned toward him, close enough that their faces were inches apart. “I know that too. Solas, do it quick and stop worrying about the pain it will cause. I'm not going to die, you know.”

“Do not think I cannot hear the anxiety in your thoughts,” he retorted. “Tell me what you're expecting.”

She took a shaky breath and held it until she didn't feel like she was going to explode anymore. “I expect it will hurt like hell.”

“And then? What happens to you in the game?”

“It...disintegrates. To the elbow.”

The pained look grew deeper and his fingers loosened on her arm as if he was about to let go entirely. “Solas, better to be done quickly than try to draw it out in order to spare me a moment's pain. Kiss me, you fool, and take it.”

He switched hands on hers, cupping her face with his right one while his left tightened around her wrist. He drew her in close and their lips met sweetly. She slanted her mouth across his, deepening the kiss, keeping her eyes closed, knowing what his were doing. She didn't need to see it. There was a wrench as his fingers gripped her like a vise, and then a feeling like she was being torn open. He swallowed her cry, his free hand now on her back of her neck, holding her in place. Her hand felt like it was unraveling like a poorly knitted sweater. She bit him to keep from screaming.

And then all at once it was gone.

“I'm sorry, vhenan,” he said, wiping her cheeks. She hadn't even realized she'd started crying. She gulped back the tears and crawled into his lap. Her arm felt much like it had the first time she used the Anchor, so long ago. “How does it feel?”

“Numb. Like I've been hit in the funny bone.” She tried to wiggle her fingers and found they would only twitch. The green veins of his magic hadn't disappeared, and he cradled her arm in his, examining them. It seemed they were both waiting for it to begin falling apart before their eyes. When it didn't after several minutes, she finally drew a steady breath. “Maybe I got lucky.”

“Perhaps I should wait a few days to leave,” he said. “I do not wish to leave you like this.”

“Solas, I'll be fine. I'm not fragile. If it hasn't started to fall apart now, it's not likely to. In the game it's pretty immediate. You've waited long enough to get this plan going. You don't have to stay on my account. Even if I like having you around.” She knew then that he had only stopped back at Skyhold to see her; if they weren't together, he'd already have been on his way to Kirkwall.

“This isn't the game,” he murmured, so softly she almost didn't hear it. But underneath the tone was acquiescence. These were their final moments together for who knew how long and neither wanted to waste them.

His arms went around her, holding her tight around her waist as if he was afraid she might turn to dust. He buried his head against her, his scalp gleaming in the lantern light of their chamber. He always seemed so vulnerable like this. He allowed himself to be, with her. She wondered if they were still connected and played a song in her head, as loudly as she could.

He gave no reaction.

Fen'Harel's got a big cock, she thought. Still nothing. She nodded, and the movement brought up his head. No more dipping. She felt a pang of sorrow at its loss. She'd come to rely on it and now she would always have to tell him in words what she was thinking. She leaned in and kissed him.

“How do *you* feel?” she asked when she pulled away.

“Whole.”

“Yeah? Are you an unstoppable force of nature now?”

He laughed, although it wasn't as light as she would have wanted. Still, his hands had moved on her, molding themselves to her backside. He stood up with her wrapped around him and walked across the chamber to their bed, laying her down gently.

“Allow me to demonstrate,” he whispered.

She reached for him with a smile. When she felt him finally drop off into sleep – after hours of careful lovemaking that included more magic than he'd ever used on her, her body was *still* humming from it – she turned her hand upright in the glow of the moonlight to look at it. It remained numb, but it hadn't spread and it hadn't become pain. It was nearly dawn before she slept, having watched it the whole time, waiting for it to disappear.

Chapter End Notes

There has been much worry and fret in my inbox of late. I'm very glad to see you all so emotionally invested in my fictional pair, I love them every bit as much as you do. The happy ending tag will most definitely apply, and I'm pointing that out because I feel like some reassurance is needed right now.

The world is still a dumpster fire, the second wave of covid is hitting hard (at least here in the US). Life is stressful. Many things are unsure, unsettled. This fic is not one of them. There is still a lot left to go, and there will still be angst because it's Solas and he thinks he's allergic to happiness for some reason (dammit, Egg, just let us love you). Carly is stubborn and determined and she will not give up. They will get there, I sincerely promise.

Virtual hugs to everyone that needs one. You readers are the best.

No Such Luck

Chapter Notes

11/20/20

Content warning for some mildly graphic imagery. Y'all know what's coming.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Their first stop was his hidden laboratory in the underground library. He gathered up a few books, his notes bound together in a journal and a mess of pencils. His orb sat on a pedestal in the corner and she nodded her head at it. “Are you taking it with you?”

“I have no need. It is empty.”

“Right.”

He put the case of lyrium shards into his pack and drew the closure tight, slinging it over his shoulder. He was already dressed in his armor and the simple bag he'd used the whole time she'd known him looked incredibly incongruous with the elegance of the plates and fur. She snorted at him and got a raised eyebrow in return.

“It looks silly,” she said. “My favorite god's all dolled up in his fancy armor, carrying a beat up excuse for a backpack like a hobo. I'm sure Dorian would have quite a few things to say about mixing your aesthetics.”

He grinned at her and kissed her quick, just a peck. A sort of desperate fear gripped her and she snagged his arm before he could leave the little room. She pulled him back to her and gave him a much better kiss, shuddering against him afterwards as she dropped her head onto his chest.

“Carly...”

“I'm terrified I'm never going to see you again, all right?” she admitted, getting the words out before she couldn't. He held her close, letting her take the time she needed before she had the willpower to let him go. She had promised herself she wasn't going to make a scene and start blubbering like a damsel in distress, but it was hard to keep. He seemed to know it too, if the look he was offering her meant anything.

“I will return to you, vhenan.”

“You better.”

He stepped back and dug under the high neck of his armor until the jawbone necklace came free. He pulled it over his head and draped it over hers. No words were necessary for the gesture; he'd done it before. A promise to come back for it. “I will.”

She held the mandible in her hand, letting the teeth dig into her palm and nodded, getting herself under control. Then she let him lead the way out of the library and through the kitchen where the elven staff all bobbed curtsies and bows before they exited to the garden. He was leaving by way of Morrigan's Eluvian, the better to not be seen by any of the Skyhold folk still remaining. They

walked together along the edge of the orderly space until they came to the locked door. She opened it for him and closed it behind them once they were in the stuffy room. The Eluvian hummed as Solas 'woke' it.

And then suddenly it was time to say their goodbyes.

“Ma fen, I love you, you know that right? More than anything in this entire world. More than hot chocolate and pizza.”

He smiled and traced a gloved finger along her hairline, following the lines of her vallaslin. “I do know that. There are not words enough to express how much you mean to me.” He cupped her face in both hands then. “Ar lath ma does not seem to suffice.”

“But it will do,” she whispered, reaching up on her tiptoes to meet him. It was a lingering kiss, the kind that mixed the salt of tears with the sweetness. She forced herself to let him go when they parted. He gave her a smile.

“I will see you in the Fade, vhenan. This parting is just distance in miles, not in truth.”

“I know. Go on.” Carly stood her ground as she watched him walk into the mirror. Only when it went dark did she allow a single sob to leave her throat.

“Where is he off to again?” Dorian called from the second floor of the rotunda, his voice booming around the otherwise empty space. Carly busied herself with tidying the worktable and called back.

“Places. Elfy stuff.”

A book – the edition of *Imperium Malefico* that he hated so much – thumped onto the table from above. She looked up to see him scowling at her over the railing. “That doesn't tell me much of anything.”

“I know,” she returned. “I can't tell you. I don't actually know.”

“Still has his secrets, eh?” Bull interjected. He loomed over Dorian and she smiled up at the pair. She was glad they were remaining for a while. She and Solas had parted often in the last year as he worked his way through his calculations and gathered up his resources. But it was different this time. There was no guarantee he'd be back. This was really it, the end of Fen'Harel's halam'shivenas.

Hopefully it wasn't the Din'anshiral.

“Don't we all?” she said to them both and went back to her tidying. In truth, there wasn't much he'd left behind and after a few minutes she gave up and leaned against the table to look over the murals. Her eyes fixed on the final one, incomplete but sketched out, the Inquisition sword in the foot of a dragon, Solas's wolf form to the side. No demon of regret was going to come off that, she'd made sure of it.

She listened idly as Bull and Dorian bickered between themselves, a steady stream of loving insults that made her smile. She was so intent on them that the sparking of her hand caught her off guard and she cried out before she could stifle it. The pain was harsh and burning, erasing the numbness in an instant. It took the wind out of her and weakened her knees so she fell to them.

“Boss?” Bull called. She was clenching her teeth too hard and couldn't answer.

“Carly!” Dorian shouted, sounding quite a bit more alarmed. She heard the thunder of footsteps on the stairs and saw them emerge from the hallway at a dead run from her periphery, but she was frozen to the spot. Her hand blazed, arcs of Fade light coming off her skin and bouncing like sparks onto the stone floor of the rotunda.

Not like this, she wailed to herself. I was supposed to get lucky!

His magical reach is finite outside the Fade, he's passed beyond his residual hold on it.

Bull's strong arms were around her, turning her in his lap so Dorian had better light to see what was happening. She flinched as Dorian touched her, trying to figure out if there was anything he could do.

“Carly, what happened?”

“Solas...took the...Anchor...” she gasped.

“Piss poor job if you ask me,” Dorian lamented.

“Not his fault. I knew...knew it would...” She watched, horrified and dumbstruck, as her pinky burned up into nothingness. “Fuck!”

Dorian was having trouble catching his breath, it seemed. She couldn't panic, it would only set him off more. With her free hand she grabbed onto Bull, who didn't appear to care in the slightest that her nails were digging into him.

“Kadan!” he snapped, drawing Dorian's attention with the whiplike sound. “Focus. Carly, breathe.”

She did, gulping air like a drowning man. She realized then that she'd rarely ever heard Bull call her by her name, and *never* in that commanding tone. He held her steady and Dorian calmed himself, his eyes turning hard and closed off as he examined the edges of the mess she was turning into. His touch grew gentle, merely keeping her arm supported as it burned away.

“Will it stop at the end of the tendrils?” he asked.

“I don't know,” she gritted out. “Never got to see it...while it's...happening.” Bull's grip shifted on her, a quick clench of his hands before he let her go again. From the corner of her eye she caught a glimpse of his two missing fingers. Which didn't help at all.

“You knew it was going to end this way,” he said, his voice a smooth rumble behind her. “You always knew.” She nodded. He laughed, unexpectedly and sharp. “That had to have been a *bitch* to live with.”

“Amatus,” Dorian scolded. “That's hardly helpful.”

“No, he's not wrong,” she managed to say almost normally. “I hoped I'd get lucky and it wouldn't happen. We...Solas and I...we talked about it a lot.”

“And this was his answer?” Dorian exclaimed, gesturing at her withering flesh. “To rip it from your hand like a weed from a garden?” A bubble of hysteria rose in her and she started to laugh. “Carly, you're hardly helping either.”

“Oh, Dorian. Him taking it was always going to make this happen.” She flinched again as the rest of her fingers burned away to ash. The pain had plateaued, still burning, still intense, but at least not getting any stronger. “It was that or leave it in me until it killed me.”

“How did he even do it? I can't imagine the kind of strength and power it took...”

“Dorian.” She waited until his eyes were on hers. “He's Fen'Harel.”

“The Dalish god of trickery and deceit? You're joking, surely.”

“Not a bit of it,” she said, then hissed through her teeth. She was wrong, the pain was definitely getting worse again. She was distracted by the look on Dorian's face. She'd apparently never seen him truly gobsmacked. She wondered what Bull looked like, then figured he was taking it in stride as per usual.

“You're shaking,” Bull said.

“It fucking hurts!”

Bull's huge hand clamped around her forearm, above the green lines bleeding sparks into the air. He held her tight enough to cut off circulation and it didn't take but a minute for the pain to ebb into hazy numbness again. “Dorian, you'll have to finish it.”

“What?! You can't seriously expect...”

“I do.” There was no arguing with that tone in Bull's voice.

“I can't just...she's my dearest friend!”

“And she's going to start bleeding a whole lotta blood if it takes off more than her wrist.”

“I'm right here,” she gritted through her teeth. “Dorian, do what you must to get to it to stop. Please!”

“I'm sorry, Carly. I'm so sorry.”

It was a litany he couldn't seem to stop as he cupped his hand over the disintegrating mass of her arm. He called up his magic with a flick of his fingers and pushed it against her. She screamed as soon as he touched her and only Bull's implacable grip kept her from flailing away. Dorian drew a shaky breath, met her eyes just once to see her nod and did it again. It felt like nullification to the counteract the Fade eating her alive, she'd been around him using Dispel before. But this felt like she was being burned. She knew he could do it, however, he manipulated magic as easily as Solas. He understood at a molecular level what he could do with it.

It didn't stop it from being agonizing, of course. And when the pain became overwhelming, she welcomed the blissful relief of unconsciousness.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry! I'm so sorry. I totally did NOT plan this to be on a Friday, and now you have to wait all weekend to find out what happens. Hugs are available upon request.

Never Let Them See You Bleed

Chapter Notes

11/24/20

There is some angst here, dear readers, but it won't last forever. Happy Thanksgiving to my US peeps. To everyone else, carry on, as you were and all that.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Vhenan, you're crying.”

“I miss you, that's all.” She hoped he hadn't caught the slight pause before she replied. They were in a glen somewhere, a place he'd conjured up either from memory or by imagination alone. There were tall trees all around them, towering so high she couldn't see the branches, but she could hear the birds in them. It was mild and sunny, and the shade they were in was dappled with it. It was no place she knew of in Thedas, although in all honesty that didn't mean much. There were places the games had never gone, after all. “Where are we?”

Solas looked around at the dream, a fond look on his face. “I believe this is in the Arbor Wilds now.”

“You believe? Don't you know?”

“It has been a long time since I walked this forest in waking.”

“Okay, fair enough.” She settled against him, carefully wrapping the figment of her now missing arm across his belly as they rested against one of the trees. Even without the Anchor, she found it took no major amount of concentration to keep it there. *My mental image of myself hasn't changed yet*, she thought. And she was glad in that moment that he could no longer dip. She could not, under any circumstances, distract him from his current duty with the truth. It could prove fatal to him, and everyone else.

Hence the tears.

“So where are you?” she asked, turning forcefully away from the anguish her waking self felt.

“Near the Tevinter/Nevarra border. A few loose ends.”

“Idiots meddling in the Fade with blood magic loose ends?”

She felt him shift under her as he looked down at her. She tipped her head up to meet his gaze. It was solemn, but underpinned with amusement. Eventually he smirked.

“As a matter of fact, yes.” He shook his head. “I will not ask how you knew. You know too much, Dalish.”

She hummed. “You haven't called me that in a long time.”

“Only when you deserve it.”

“Pbfft.” The bird song changed in the dream, sounding more like what she heard around Skyhold. “Dawn's coming. I think I'm waking up.” He tightened his arm around her one last time before releasing her and letting her sit up. Eye to eye they looked at each other for a moment before she smiled and leaned in to kiss him. “Ar lath ma, ma fen.”

“Ar lath ma, vhenan.” He tucked her hair behind her ear, lingering in a caress along the length of the point. “I will be on the move again soon. I do not know when next I will find you here.”

“It's okay. As long as you drop a line now and then so I know you're safe.”

His lips curved. “Of course.”

He kissed her again, sipping at her gently as she slid away from the dream. His touch dissolved into a soft gray fog and then she woke.

The ache assailed her as soon as she opened her eyes. The kind that spoke of staying in one position too long, of drugging potions and the tedium of bed rest. She turned her head in the gloom of her chamber and saw Bull's head nodded down onto his broad chest on a chair next to the bed. Dorian was laid out on her other side. She smiled and began to stretch, waking them both.

“Hey, look at me, still alive,” she said when they were done blinking away the sleep from their eyes.

“How you feelin' Boss?”

“Just peachy. Can I have real food yet?”

“Only if you can do it with one hand,” Bull said. Dorian sputtered.

“Must you be so harsh about it?”

Bull transferred his gaze to his lover. “She can take the reality, kadan. Always could. Better than pretending everything's fine.”

“He's right,” she said before Dorian could go off on a rant about it. “Don't treat me with kid gloves. I've had a lot longer to mentally prepare for this than you realize.” Dorian swiped his hands down his face, nearly hiding the expression he wore. She knew he meant well, and he was taking this hard. She lifted her bandaged stump and laid it on his arm, almost as if she still had a hand to grasp him with. “Hey, I'm still here, I'm gonna get better, and right now I need food.”

She let Dorian get up from the bed before she shuffled herself into a seated position. Her whole body just felt *bleh* and she made a face. “I need a bath too, although I'm fairly certain neither of you wants that duty.”

She caught Dorian glaring at Bull before the Qunari could say anything and she hid a grin. “Fine,” Dorian said. “Food. Then we'll send up someone *suitable* to help you bathe. Would Josephine be acceptable or one of the numerous servants still crawling around here?”

“Josie, please.” She could take diplomacy in her current state, but not pity. Even well meaning pity. Besides, too many of her staff were agents of Solas, and aside from Misyl, she didn't know exactly which ones they were. She didn't want word getting to him prematurely.

Carly and Bull watched Dorian until he went down the stairs. Bull then turned back to her and gave

her a hard stare. "All right, now that the fop is out of the room, how are you really?"

Tears burned unshed. "Awful. I saw Solas in the Fade. I didn't tell him."

"Why?" Bull manfully kept his distaste about the Fade to himself. It was almost enough to cure her mood, but then the question penetrated.

"Because if I tell him, he'll come home. He'll leave the job half done again and we can't afford another moment of this nonsense. He needs to finish it, with no worry for me."

"That takes bravery, Boss."

Something about his simple acceptance made the tears spill and she was sobbing before she knew it. She always forgot how fast he could move and his arms were around her in a blink, letting her wail into his chest like a child. When it was over she was thoroughly drained by the outburst, but she also felt better. She clung to him for a moment longer before pushing him away.

"Gah, help me clean up before Dorian sees me like this. I'd never hear the end of it, or ever get a moment's peace again."

Bull swiped up a rag and wet it from the bowl on the nightstand. He washed her face carefully, mindful of his huge hands. "No problem, Boss."

Josephine indeed handled bathing her with care and diplomacy and no pity, heartfelt or otherwise. Once she was clean and dressed she sat on her sofa, leaning idly against the corner of it and watching her fire burn. Her body hadn't quite decided how to react to the shock of losing part of a limb and she got cold easily. Plus, it was still winter, no matter what the weather directly outside her balcony doors said.

There was a soft knock on the door below and she called for whoever it was to enter, girding herself up for more socializing. The footsteps coming up the stairs were not familiar and she looked up in time to see white hair and green vallaslin as Abelas stopped at the top, looking her over with something like a critical eye. His gaze landed on the jawbone and his eyes widened just a tiny bit.

"I didn't expect to see *you* among my visitors," she said without thinking. A small smile creased the corners of his mouth.

"I wanted to see with my own eyes if you are well, Da'Fen."

She held up her bandaged stump and raised an eyebrow. Abelas came fully into the room and sat carefully on the other end of the sofa when she invited him to. "What would you say? Am I well?"

"No, you are not." Something about the way he said the words was relieving rather than chiding. It was a declaration of fact, nothing more, nothing less. They sat in silence for a while, until the fire popped and began to go out. He leaned forward and used the poker to shuffle the logs, adding some fresh ones on top. When he sat back, he saw that she was watching him. "Are you in pain?"

"Not especially." His golden eyes were calm and his face unreadable, but she got the sense that *now* he was chiding her. "Fine, yes it hurts. It's a constant ache completely different from the Anchor."

"May I see?"

He seemed aware that he was asking a highly personal thing, but Carly held out her arm for him, noting with no small surprise that he slid to his knees on the floor rather than crowd her on the sofa. He cradled her elbow to support the arm and unwrapped the bandages with such care that she didn't even flinch. She was grateful she still *had* an elbow. She had half her forearm too before it abruptly terminated.

“Was it common in your time?” she asked.

“Loss of limb?” Abelas met her eyes and his face had lost some of its sternness. “In times of war, yes. Magic can heal many ills, but this is not one of them.”

“That's not why I was asking. I was just curious if you'd seen it before.”

Her skin was puckered and angry red at the end of the stump, all but melted where Dorian had used his magic to stop the remains of the Anchor's power from eating her alive. The end of her arm was a mangled mess, sealed with burns rather than stitches. Abelas's fingers were cool against her, his supporting hand under her elbow steady. As cool as his touch was, his magic was warm and she gasped in surprise.

“Did I hurt you?”

“No, I'm just...it's different. I'm used to Solas.”

Again, his lips quirked in the corner, not quite a smile. “Fen'Harel was often accused of having a cold heart, and so his magic was cold.”

She snorted. “I don't know that I'd ever describe Solas as 'cold'. Calculating, yes. Cold implies a lack of passion, and that isn't him at all.”

A true smile lit Abelas's face, reaching up to crinkle his eyes. They flicked over the jawbone again. “You would know better than I, Da'Fen.”

She snorted again, and finally let out the laugh that wanted to escape. Waves of gentle heat bathed her forearm and she could feel the tension leaving her. The angry red of the burns faded to healing pink, although the skin itself remained mottled and scarred. He let go as soon as he was finished and sat back at the end of the sofa, looking rather drained. She didn't bother to wrap it back up. “Thank you, Abelas. You didn't have to go to the trouble.”

“Da'banal. It was no trouble. I would not have you suffer further indignities with such an injury among shemlen.”

“They're not all bad, you know.”

“Their medicine is primitive. As is their magic. Such mishandling of the flesh would not have occurred among the Elvhen.”

“It was hardly an ideal circumstance,” she said stoutly, defending Dorian. “And none of us knew what to expect.”

“Forgive me, Da'Fen. I should not criticize. Your human mage did the best he could. I must remind myself that his nation has passed fewer years than my life.”

“Apology accepted, hahren,” she said with a teasing smile. “So, you being here. Are you feeling like you need to step in since Solas is gone?”

“I would be lax in my duty if I allowed misfortune to befall the Dread Wolf's consort.”

“That's not quite an answer.” She grinned, both at his sentiment and at his acknowledgment of her relationship to Solas. There was approval there, unspoken but definite. “It's okay, I find that's pretty common with you venerable types.”

He wanted to frown, but he also wanted to laugh, she could see it in his eyes. She kept grinning at him, hoping the laugh would win. It did, although the sound was dry and rusty. “Perhaps that is so.” He grew serious again. “With your leave, I shall stay and watch over you.”

“Do you really think that's necessary?”

“You are still the Inquisitor. This world is still in chaos. Danger is present. You should not be alone to face it when you are...below capacity.”

She smirked at him. “That's a fine way to say useless.”

“You have healing to do and strength to regain. You are not useless.”

“Will I though?” she sighed. “Will I heal? I'll never shoot a bow again. Not like this.”

“There are mechanical means to replace a limb, are there not?”

“You mean a prosthetic? Sure, but...”

“Is there not a Child of Stone highly praised for her enchanting among your followers?”

“Dagna. Yeah. I don't have the first idea of where to begin, though. Even though I knew this was coming I...well, I let other things get in the way.”

“You have time, Da'Fen. And in the meantime, I shall guard you. The world may see you as debilitated as you recover your strength, but it will not see you without protection.”

“Thank you, Abelas. I mean that. Hey, mister venerable Sentinel, I need you to promise you won't tell him.” He gazed at her steadily, but she could see the tick of his pulse at his temple. *Busted*, she thought. “None of us can afford to distract him right now. I'd appreciate it if none of his agents told him. If you could...ya know...pass that around.”

“Ma nuvenin, Da'Fen.” He gave her something like a seated bow. She nodded and felt a yawn creeping up her throat and realized that she'd had more activity in one day than she'd had for several. His head bobbed again, seeing how tired she was. “Sleep and heal. I will be here.”

Chapter End Notes

Da'banal - you're welcome/no big deal. A word of my own creation via Project Elvhen literally meaning 'small nothing'.

Care To Give Me a Hand?

Chapter Notes

11/27/20

Y'all can thank my beta for this chapter title. She is a terrible influence and I love her to death.

There was no hiding it among the residents at Skyhold, so she didn't bother to try, confident that Solas's agents among her people would at least heed Abelas if not her. The Sentinel stayed with her most of the time, a solitary vigil in the room that at first had felt strange. Now it was just comforting. He didn't play chess nearly as well as Solas however, and her wins against him brought more joy from the look on his face that he'd lost to a shem than from actually winning. Little did he know she wasn't a shemlen anymore.

In a week she was on her feet again, not quite up to dressing herself, although she was improving on that. She began holding her meetings again and being seen around the castle. She learned to close her eyes to the looks and her ears to the whispers. She never went anywhere without an Elvhen escort. The Sentinels were already familiar around the keep, and seeing them with her tended to quell rumors. She'd spoken with Misyl too, knowing she was one of Solas's spies. She wouldn't talk either. Instead, she held Carly in a motherly embrace when she broke down again, drying her eyes and making her a cup of soothing tea and making her sit in the warm kitchen as if nothing was out of place.

Now she was walking the rampart over the garden with Dorian. Abelas stood discreetly at the juncture of guard tower and stairs, his face passive but his attention sharp.

"Why does Solas even have spies here?" Dorian asked her, exasperated. "One would think he'd trust his lover not to stab him in the back."

"Dorian, it's Thedas. No one has that kind of trust."

"All right, that's...not a bad point. Still..."

"It's habit, I think. I've never called him on it, or told them to leave. In my version, Solas would have left me by now. His spies were all that were left to give him news of me and the Inquisition." She didn't mention that Solas's spies were also keeping an eye out for potential Qunari infiltrators.

"And you're all right with that?" He looked at her incredulously, then glanced back to where Abelas stood watch. "Unbelievable."

They walked on, heading for the stairs that would eventually lead down into the garden. Carly looked back at Abelas, grinning at his composed yet disdainful look. "You can go, you know, hahren. I'm perfectly safe with Dorian."

The vallaslin on his forehead crinkled, denoting where a raised eyebrow would be if he had any. "The self same mage who burned your hand off?"

"Hey, what did I say about that?" she jumped in before Dorian could sputter. Abelas relented and

bowed, stiffly walking ahead of them and into the garden. It was something of a compromise, she knew. He'd leave them alone, but did not leave off his duty to make sure she was safe. "Sorry," she said to her companion. "He's got...*opinions* on human magic."

"Of course he does," Dorian replied with remarkable equanimity. "He's an ancient elf. They're something of a wonder, aren't they? Just walking around Skyhold like living legends."

She snorted. "I'm sleeping with a living legend."

"Don't remind me."

"You brought it up."

"You're ridiculous. I don't know how you stand it, all that knowledge in your head and yet you still..."

"He's just Solas to me."

"How do you reconcile it?" He seemed very serious now. They leaned on the stone wall overlooking the garden and contemplated the view. "How do you take a woman from another dimension, plop her into this...*mess*, and then have her save the world and get her prince charming all in one? Her prince charming who happens to be an ancient god, no less. Vasta kass, I can't believe I just uttered those words."

"With careful deliberation," she replied, resting her head on his arm. "And a whole lot of idiocy."

"Those tend to be mutually exclusive, my dear."

"I didn't actually mean to fall for him, you know. He was a sneaky bastard about it, just like the game."

"Ahh, I see. What you're saying is, you were the idiot who should have known better."

"Yup."

He lifted his arm around her and pulled her close. "You're happy. He's happy and not going to destroy the world. We're all happy."

"Yeah."

"You know I am reminded of a conversation we once had."

"After he and I had that terrible fight? Yeah, I wondered when you'd bring that up."

"I should have guessed sooner."

"You had no reason to. He was good at hiding it from everyone but me. If it helps, Cass knows too. I told her right after we beat Corypheus."

"Now I'm just insulted you waited this long to tell *me*."

"Sorry." They made equally mocking faces at each other before smiling. She still leaned on him, letting him wordlessly support her.

Dorian chuckled suddenly and she lifted her head from him to see him looking down to where Cullen was playing chess very studiously with a woman. "Are you seeing this?"

"I am."

"What's that about?"

"That's Ava, Arl Teagan's niece. Or niece by marriage. Something like that. Anyway, she came up to Skyhold from Redcliffe with a message from Alistair. Sorry, *King* Alistair." She turned to him and gave him a falsely disparaging look. "You didn't know?"

"I was speaking more of this scene," he waved a hand towards the chess game.

"She's spent a lot of her free time with our dear Commander."

"How do you know that?"

She gave Dorian a mild look. "Because I asked her to."

Dorian sputtered for a moment before his expression turned crafty. "My dear, are you matchmaking?"

"Me?" She asked, putting her hand over her heart, her face deliberately aghast. "I would never dream of so thoroughly interfering in my friends' lives."

"Hmm, that rings so hollow and false I am at a loss for words."

"Wow, and yet you strung a whole lot of them together. I also don't hear you complaining about you and Bull," she teased. He frowned at her, but he didn't mean it. "Honestly though. They have a lot in common, she's a clever girl who knows how to get what she wants without being a bitch about it and...well...she's not a mage."

"What does that have to do with it?"

"Cullen's had some...terrible history with mages. Not my place to talk about it. Ava's a sweet girl who could turn his head in a blink if she wanted to, or just be a good friend if that's all they want too."

"This world doesn't deserve you, Carly."

"Probably not. Let it be my burden to bear."

He held her very close again and spoke into her hair. "We will just have to make ourselves worthy somehow."

Dagna was jumpy, which wasn't anything new. But her eyes kept sliding over Carly's shoulder to Abelas and Carly wondered if her Arcanist was extra jumpy because of her guard or because she wanted to ask him a bazillion questions and maybe take a sample of his armor, fingernails and bow.

"I think I have a design you'll like," Dagna gushed, sweeping a table clear to lay out the drawing. It was deceptively simple at first glance. A sheath to go over her stump, an articulated wrist joint and fingers. It looked like it was supposed to be cast in ceramic over a metal frame. To the side were calculations and diagrams of runes and enchantments.

"Walk me through it."

"It will of course have straps to hold it in place, but once it's up and running, it should function just

like a real hand.”

“Powered how? Lyrium?”

“Yes.”

“And how will that work? Preferably without poisoning me.”

“I’m good at my job, Inquisitor,” Dagna said, only a little acerbically. “There will be a slot for the lyrium to connect to the rune system, powering the whole thing as long as you’re wearing it.”

“And where will the lyrium be?” She had a feeling she wasn’t going to like this part.

“Oh, right!” Dagna giggled. “In your arm, of course. So it can form a connection with your body and the arm at the same time. Like a conduit.”

“And how will that *not* poison me?”

“Oh, I’ll have it encased, probably in some sort of nonreactive material, embedded right into the skin. Won’t affect you or anyone around you. Just the links to the runes.”

Abelas stood behind the pair of them, looking over the drawing. It seemed he could follow the equations readily and Carly wondered why she was surprised. Was there anything these Elvhen couldn’t do? His eyes met hers briefly and he looked like he wanted to say something.

“Well?”

“I believe I can help. One of our number was an artificer before joining the ranks of the Sentinels. She can assist, and perhaps define a better strategy for implanting lyrium into you.”

Dagna gasped with joy. “That would be great! I admit, I hadn’t fully worked that part out yet.”

Carly breathed and counted to ten. Then she nodded. “Okay, let’s do it. Abelas, does this Sentinel speak the common tongue or will we need an interpreter?”

“I can serve, Da’Fen.”

She raised her eyebrows at him. “You know that means you would have to stay here the whole time, right?”

He gave her a small smile, almost cheeky. “I am confident you will be safe in the interim. There are others to keep watch over you.”

“Just like that?”

He inclined his head. “The sooner you are able, the quicker we can return you to training.”

“And the sooner I can protect myself. Okay, I’m convinced.” She looked between the two of them, seeing a strange sort of kinship growing and shook her head. “All right, let’s get started.”

Contrary to her teasing that she would be wandering around Skyhold without Abelas’s protection, Carly stayed in the Undercroft for the meeting between Dagna and the Sentinel Revanas. She was a tall woman, lean and spare like all of the others in residence, her face marked with blue vallaslin honoring Mythal on her cheeks. She wasn’t wearing the armor, but there was no mistaking her. She

was the elf who had guided Carly and Solas in the Temple, the one who'd wordlessly watched her stand at the Dread Wolf's mosaic teasing him about whether or not it was a good likeness. Outside of her serious duty, she turned out to be quite cheerful and talkative and Carly watched with amusement as Abelas attempted to keep up with the two of them as they conversed and went off on tangents.

In the end it appeared to be a simple thing. Carefully processed lyrium would be contained within a flexible casing of dragonling scales and lined with dawnstone to keep the powerful material from leaching into her body. It would be embedded in her flesh and allowed to heal. They'd debated on whether or not to use volcanic aurum, until Carly pointed out that it was fundamentally the same as gold, and would be too reactive and conductive. She earned herself an impressed look from Dagna for that. Meanwhile, the dwarf would begin crafting the plates of the prosthetic – along with the corresponding runes and enchantments – before fitting it to her arm.

The plans were set, and now it was a waiting game before she underwent what was, in essence, alchemical surgery. She wasn't sure if she was looking forward to it or terrified.

Where Our Dreams Take Us

Chapter Notes

12/1/20

Contrary to what my archive says, so full of E ratings as it is, I **can** actually write non-explicit smut. And therefore this chapter isn't marked as NSFW, although there is a short scene of intimacy for our favorite lovers.

Carly watched people move around the keep, looking for something she couldn't quite name. It didn't solidify until she saw Cullen. He was talking with Bull and Krem, which in itself wasn't all that unusual. There were many strategic plans still to be implemented, especially now that she was...

...One armed and hampered, she finished the thought sourly.

Cullen was standing taller and more confident than she'd seen since the early days. From where she was she could see his face was smooth and there were no shadows under his eyes. No pinched lines of stress around his mouth. She remembered Cole's voice in her dreams, the ones where she tried to find Solas but couldn't. Cole must have felt her unease about that, and he'd appeared like a wraith, whispering in her metaphorical ear. *"The old dreams die, new dreams not yet born. He rises and takes the darkness with him."*

She waited until Bull and Krem nodded smartly and took off on their respective agendas before she approached. "Commander, if I may say so, you're looking very...rested today."

"Am I?" He seemed surprised and maybe a bit abashed to be discussing his sleep with her. "I suppose I did sleep rather well, now that you mention it."

They shared a look that said too many things. She had a moment of private satisfaction that her matchmaking was successful. And she promised herself she wouldn't tease him about it, as shy as he was about those kinds of things. She stuck to a safer subject instead.

"There have been no more nightmares, have there?" she asked. Cullen was staring at her, clear eyed but suddenly pale, as if she'd caught him doing something far more nefarious than getting a good night's rest. She smiled. "I expect that no more will come, at least, not for a long time."

"How do you know?" She absently rubbed her left arm. By now everyone in Skyhold knew that their apostate mage was really an ancient Elvhen god. It had been hard to keep it a secret once he'd left and she'd suffered such a catastrophic injury. How many *believed* it was a different story, and not one that mattered right now. "You knew he was planning this, didn't you?"

"Eh...sorta. The nightmare demon wasn't exactly on the docket until it made a move against me. He...took care of it."

"Do I want to ask how?"

"Probably not." Cullen gave her a look that plainly stated he could take it. She sighed. "Fine. He absorbed its power and shrank it back to what it's supposed to be."

“What was the demon trying to accomplish?”

“It wanted to make me doubt my place, my decisions. It wanted me to make mistakes and bring about new nightmares from everyone. Solas stopped it. More or less.” She didn't feel like getting into the intricacies of Cole's role in the matter. The humans around her had less of a grasp on the nature of spirits than she did, and she knew she couldn't hold that against them or expect them to fully understand just yet. Which was part of the reason she hadn't said anything before now. It had been months, after all, since the Nightmare had been defeated.

“What does this mean, Inquisitor?”

“It means peaceful sleep for us, and it was a head start of oomph for him.” She smiled wider at his expression, equal parts fear and hope. “He needed the power and he always wanted peace for us. He's not evil you know, regardless of what tales you've heard.”

“He *is* called the Dread Wolf,” Cullen pointed out.

“Yeah, but that's just...a mistranslation. 'Harellen' means rebellion or opposition. It doesn't mean dread, unless you're on the receiving end of his rebellion.”

“That implies there is someone on the receiving end?”

“Yeah, there is. You've known other Dalish elves, right? He's going after the ones they call the Creators. Who didn't really create *anything* and are the whole reason he made the Veil in the first place.”

“It's truly strange how you know such things.”

“C'mon, Cullen, is it really so hard to wrap your head around me being from another world when you guys have magic, magic that suppresses other magic, darkspawn, Archdemons and gods of myth walking around you?”

He made a rueful face before he let out a laugh. “All right, you have me there. Truly, is there no magic in your world?”

“It's not like this. Solas once said something about how creative we were for using technology instead of magic, but I'm sure to the average Thedosian, my technology would appear as magical to them as your actual magic appears to me.”

“Perhaps that is true. You don't speak of it much.”

“No, I don't. For a long time it was because I didn't want to screw up the timeline with too much foreknowledge. Only a handful knew for a very good reason, it's not that I wanted to hide it.”

“I understand.”

“Do you? That's...well, that's actually relieving. I didn't want anyone thinking I was being purposely deceitful. It's just...”

“Most never know what their actions will accomplish, or know the consequences of them. But you did. It must have been a terrible burden.”

“It was. I'm glad I don't have it anymore. From here on out, I have little knowledge of the future.”

“Really?”

“Really really. Most of my knowledge of events stopped at the point where the story had been written in my world, which was...oh, about two weeks ago.”

“Your arm?”

She'd never understood people who underestimated Cullen Rutherford. Behind the boyish face and traumatizing life lay a good mind, tactical and steadfast. Put him at the head of an army, as she had done, and he was unstoppable. She smiled. “Yeah, plus a couple other things that aren't super pertinent right now. In that version, it's the last time anyone, including the Inquisitor, sees Solas.”

“Is that what you wanted to change then? The outcome of all his plans?”

“More or less. I wanted to save him from a duty he felt he needed to see through, show him there was another way to get it done without destroying the world in the process. Right now, I'm in the same boat you are. I don't know if I succeeded.”

“Support from the right places is a wonderful thing, Inquisitor. Without it, there is doubt and fear. With it, there is assurance and a willingness to succeed. You have given him that. You have given all of us that.”

She smiled at him. “Thanks, Cullen. I appreciate that.”

Cullen nodded at her. “You're welcome. And now, I must be off. Ava is...”

He paused and she smirked, glee barely hidden. “Yes?”

“Ava would like me to meet her for lunch.” He blushed.

“Go on, I wouldn't want to interrupt your tryst with business.”

“It's not a...” he sputtered and she laughed.

“Go, Commander. Say hello to Ava for me.”

“Yes, Inquisitor.” Her peals of laughter followed him as he dashed away.

“Did you fall asleep in the middle of the day, vhenan?” Solas asked, stepping into her dreaming state as easily as if he walked into a room. She'd been looking for him in the Fade for days without any luck, and *now* was when he decided to just appear? She kept a tight rein on her emotional state before it could affect the Fade around them. She was unconscious, yes, but not because she was napping.

She was having lyrium implanted into her arm.

“Naps are good for the spirit,” she managed and let herself relax as he laughed.

“There are layers there,” he teased, leaning down to her reclined dreaming self to plant a kiss on her forehead. He was right, of course. A small wispy spirit of hope hovered nearby, as well as one of determination. She hoped they weren't clueing him in too much.

“I haven't seen you for a while,” she said, turning the topic. “How are the plans progressing?”

“Well enough.” He conjured up a wider lounging sofa for them to lay on and slid next to her, wrapping his arms around her to hold her close. Their meetings had been far too brief and

infrequent lately. "I have been implementing my spell along the routes where red lyrium is known to be, and destroying those I cannot heal. It will not be long before the final phase begins."

The Fade itself.

She nodded and rested comfortably against his chest, soaking in his touch like a balm. Her ongoing surgery receded from her mind. His hands began to wander over her body and she wriggled around to face him, something occurring to her.

"Hey, if you're here right now too, are *you* napping?"

He smirked. "I am. I grew weary of walking."

"So many ancient ruins to explore and you picked here to dream?" she joked. His eyes lit up with mirth, and then heat. He cradled her gently and kissed her.

"Is there anywhere else I should prefer to be than in your arms?" he murmured.

"Oh, so smooth, ma fen," she murmured back. She clung to him as he kissed her again, his teeth nipping her bottom lip, his tongue slipping against hers. It was sweet and so very real, for all she knew it was a dream. It wasn't long before their touches turned from comfort to seeking. Their bodies were entwined in a position that would be nearly impossible while awake and she didn't think about it too hard, not wanting to dispel the dream of making love to him.

He held her through the suffusing crest and beyond and if he knew that she was hiding anything from him, he didn't say so. She knew there were always things he was hiding from her, after all. Even still. They trusted each other enough to let the secrets lie.

The afterglow extended through the rest of the dream until she began to feel herself waking. With a smile and whisper of 'duty calls', she left the Fade.

She opened her eyes to the clinically clean space of the Skyhold infirmary where Dagna, Revanas and Dorian stood by, all looking thoroughly exhausted but proud of their accomplishment. Her arm was held in a kind of stasis rather than in bandages. She could pivot it around and see the glowing blue lyrium freshly implanted under a layer of new skin, but she couldn't touch it. And she felt no pain.

Dorian met her questioning glance. "It needs to heal before we can finish. Your body must accept the casing without issue. I'm sure it would be maddeningly agonizing any other way."

"All right," she said, her voice as rough and gritty as his. How long had she been under? Her body buzzed with the aftereffects of the dream, but that was no indicator of time. "How long did it take?"

"Ten hours," Dagna said, wiping her face with a wet cloth. "I've never done anything so complex before."

"I'm duly impressed," she said. Looking the three of them over she jerked her head. "Go on, go get some rest. You all look like you could use it."

"I shall remain with you," Abelas said, and she turned to face him. She hadn't even noticed him there. Although, with Revanas involved in the procedure along with her Arcanist and her favorite magical theorist, she should have realized he'd be there to translate. He held up a book she recognized from the stack Solas had brought back from the Vir Dirthara. She grinned at him.

“Going to read me bedtime stories, ma falon?”

He echoed her smile. “Ma nuvenin, lethallan. And should you fall asleep while I read, I will not take it amiss.”

Into the City of Chains

Chapter Notes

12/4/20

Happy Dragon Age Day!!!

*Vhenan...*the voice rumbled through the Fade as she wandered aimlessly through it, making no attempt to control her surroundings as she usually did. Physically she was in a camp in the Hinterlands, mentally she was sitting in an ivy bound gazebo, watching a party of blurry faces from the distant past. The only familiar thing in the dream was the crystal grace growing in a hedgerow. The voice was pained and exhausted, but it was Solas. She nearly woke from the shock of it, and his final words drifted like whispers as her dreams were washed away by gray fog. *Find me. Sundermount.*

She sat up in her bedroll in a flash and flexed her new hand. It didn't exactly obey her command, but it moved. These past several weeks hadn't really been enough time to work through all the bugs with it. She, Dagna and Sera, as well as Bull and Dorian, had decided a more expert opinion was needed and they'd traveled to the nearest surface entrance to Orzammar so they could consult with dwarves who'd made such things before. Hence sleeping in an Inquisition camp for the first time in nearly a year.

The dwarves had done what they could and the connection between her graft of lyrium and the runes and enchantments on the prosthetic was as good as it would get. From here, it was just a matter of practice to get the coordination down.

And now...now it was time to cross the Waking Sea. She clambered out of her roll and woke the others.

Kirkwall wasn't entirely what Carly expected. That seemed to be her mantra when encountering things in Thedas.

It was easy to fall back on the common joke that the city was a shit hole, and her initial view of it from the ship seemed to confirm that. At first glance it was dirty, messy and looked unorganized. The city rose in tiers into the mountain, each level clearing up gradually until Hightown stood pristine above the rest. There were too many metaphors for having one's nose in the air so as not to notice the ground below in her head.

But she could also see where reconstruction efforts had built up new stairs between levels, and the streets were cleaner than one would immediately think to find in a city where the most common trade was metal smelting. The spire of the rebuilt Chantry gleamed in the distance, still new enough that it was like a beacon on the horizon. The tang of new wood floated on the breeze, even with the stench of brine and fish. The docks were straight and tidy and there were more moored ships than empty slots. The warehouses shadowing them had been painted in the not too distant past, giving them more a weathered than dilapidated look.

Inquisition ravens had done their job and she saw Hawke waiting for them, a brindle patterned Mabari at her side. The dog was half sprawled to accommodate its broad hips, and its tongue was lolling from its mouth in the silliest expression she'd seen on an animal ever. Carly stood at the railing of the prow and waved to Hawke, who waved back, the joy lighting her face visible even at this distance.

When they were finally moored and disembarked – Dorian riding her heels in case she lost her balance, Bull shaking his head at Dorian's continued over-protectiveness, Sera's face set in a moue of distaste and Dagna's with a grin – Hawke took Carly in a hard embrace. “You made it.”

“You're as bad as Dorian, Marian. I'm not made of glass.”

Hawke let her go and took a step back. “Fine, then. Let me see it.”

Carly held up her left arm and tried to wiggle the fingers of the prosthetic her team of inventors had made. Two of them heeded her command, the rest went their own way. The gesture as a whole made her snicker, and Hawke wasn't far behind her.

“Well, it's pretty, at least. How long have you had it?”

“I finished before we left Skyhold,” Dagna piped up. “We had some...complications and went to Orzammar to polish it up.”

“So not long at all. You've got pretty good command of it already then.” Hawke rested her hand on the Mabari's head and smiled. “This is Jespa, although no one calls her that. Walnut,” Hawke said in a loving tone, “this is the Inquisitor, Carly.”

Jespa – or Walnut, presumably – stood up from her slouch and sniffed Carly's outstretched right hand. “Nice to meet you.”

“Boof!”

“I see you've at least heard of Mabari, then,” Hawke said.

“Yes, although this is my first real meeting with one. Cullen keeps talking about getting one, and I'd like him to. It would give him something else to worry over besides me.” She ruffled the dog's ears. Walnut thumped her stumpy tail on the ground, raising up a puff of dust.

Hawke smiled. “You hear that, Walnut? I think we may have found a home for that last pup.” She looked over their group and gestured. “C'mon gang. You all look like you could use a seat somewhere that isn't floating.”

“Mercy, yes,” Dorian said. “Maker preserve me and take me somewhere civilized.”

They followed Hawke up the hill into Hightown, garnering strange looks as they passed. Carly wasn't sure if it was because of Hawke, herself or Bull. The looks weren't hostile, merely curious. Carly noticed they were headed to the Viscount's estate and snorted.

“They finally talked him into it, did they?”

“The city council? Yeah. He's still grumbling about the paperwork.”

“He's a good Viscount. He'll do a lot to fix Kirkwall's reputation, not to mention the lives of everyone here.”

“Just don't tell him that, he'll put more pressure on himself.”

“Oh, I won't. I know how he is.” She nudged Hawke with her shoulder. “You living there?”

“Of course,” Hawke replied with a laugh. “Although the Amell estate is still mine too.”

“Do I hear Chantry bells in your future?”

“Perhaps.”

The group arrived at the mansion and Hawke let them choose rooms in the guest wing wherever they wanted. It was bright and airy inside, a definite change from the dour building as portrayed in the game. Carly smiled to see the evidence of Hawke's hand in the décor. Varric himself strolled into the study once he was done with whatever business he was handling that day, greeting her with the same hard hug Hawke had given her.

“You look good for half dead, Peaches.”

“You too.”

He grumbled but smiled when he saw Bull and Dorian. “Welcome to the great shit hole of Thedas.”

“It's really not that bad, you know,” Carly said. “I've seen it a lot worse. I mean, nothing's on fire.”

“That you can see from here anyway,” Varric said. They all arrayed themselves around the study, Dorian immediately beginning to peruse Varric and Hawke's collection of books. Bull was surprised to find a great stone chair big enough to fit him and gave Varric a shrewd look that made the dwarf grin.

“I heard you were coming,” he said.

“I appreciate it, Varric. I realize publicly displaying Qunari furniture in a city like Kirkwall might not be the best idea.”

“Are you kidding? We have a warehouse full of the shit. The Arishok...that is, the *former* Arishok was here for years. Dividing it up like spoils of war is in fashion. Plus I can tax the shit out of it.” They had a good laugh over that and then Varric turned more businesslike eyes on Carly. “All right, I need details. Your raven was less than forthcoming.”

“What do you already know?”

“I know that Solas and a mysterious female figure purported to be everyone's favorite dragon shifting Witch of the Wilds were seen going up to Sundermount more than a month ago. And then nothing until three nights ago when there was an explosion. Rocks are still falling into the city. I'm told by people who dream that the ones they had that night were...weird in the extreme. I haven't sent up a team yet. Figured I'd wait for you.”

“Solas and Flemeth were going to access the Fade from the peak. The Veil is already thin there, and has been breached before. He thought it would be the best place to try. Three nights ago, the night you had an explosion here, I got a 'call' in the Fade. He's up there, on the mountain. Back in the waking world.”

“And Flemeth?” Hawke asked.

“No idea. His message was less a conversation and more a scream into the Void...literally.”

“You got here awful fast.”

“I left Skyhold a few weeks ago since the arm needed work. We were staying outside Orzammar while Dagna fine tuned with some Smiths.” She wiggled her prosthetic fingers again. This time they obeyed a bit better. “From there it was just a quick ride to Jader and we caught the first ship bound for Kirkwall. Being Inquisitor has some perks.”

“What's going on here, Peaches?”

“I'm not entirely sure. I've actually reached the point of no more foreknowledge. But I know that the plan was to enter the Fade and take care of some business there.”

“What kind of business?” Hawke asked.

“Most likely the Evanuris kind.”

“Shit. I should have had Daisy come here.” Varric and Hawke exchanged a glance. “And now he's up on Sundermount, and he called you through the Fade in some weird dream bullshit that you people do and we have no idea what he did or if he was successful. Great.” Varric made a face that first appeared sour, but Carly saw the gleam in his eye. He was mightily tired of playing at dutiful politician. He was ready for a new adventure.

“Time to get Bianca out of storage, eh?” Carly shared a grin with Hawke.

“Yes, it is,” the Champion replied.

“Okay, but first I need a meal that isn't fish, a bed that doesn't sway and maybe even a bath with hot water. Think any of those could be in my future?”

“All of them, Peaches. Never let it be said I'm a bad host.” He chuckled at her. “I thought you said your trip wasn't that bad.”

“It was still crossing the Waking Sea. On a fishing trawler.”

“All right, that's fair.” He grinned. “Welcome to Thedas, Peaches.”

“I've been here for almost three years, Varric. You're a little late.”

“Fine, welcome to Kirkwall, then.”

She gave him a crooked grin. “That works.”

“First things first,” Dorian said, coming back to the group of them, holding out a copy of something large and hardbound. It looked well worn, the binding cracked and the leather peeling. “Why on the Maker's blessed, green earth do you have a copy of *this*? It's pure propaganda.”

He showed Varric the title. The *Imperium Malifico*. Carly snorted and looked over at Varric, just waiting for the joke she knew he was waiting to spring.

Varric smiled. “Just to see if it would piss you off, Sparkler.”

Wards, Cleverness and Secrets

Chapter Notes

12/8/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sundermount was truly sundered. The peak was blasted clean of any vegetation and they saw the shattered trees flattening those further down the mountain before they even reached the top. A level plateau of bare stone and grit met them at the end of the path, and Carly heard herself make a sound like an anguished animal when she saw him in the center of it.

He lay in a careless heap, as if he'd fallen from a height while unconscious. The swirl of wards surrounding him told her otherwise. She couldn't approach too closely without feeling them against her skin, buzzing mildly. She extended her good hand into the field and it burned like hot acid had been poured on it. When she pulled her hand back, however, there were no marks. But it was quite obvious that his wards no longer recognized her as part of him without the Anchor.

"How will we get him out?" Varric asked, his voice hushed either by the utter destruction of the location or his own awe at it. It was hard to tell.

Carly looked at her prosthetic hand. Flesh was repelled out of wards. But her new hand was not flesh.

She put the lyrium enchanted fingers against the field and waited for feedback. There was none.

"Okay, let me try something." She got on her knees, as close to the wards as she could without burning her face on them. She reached the prosthetic through and tried to grab a hold on his collar. She was just a few inches short, although the ceramic fingers finally seemed to be cooperating with her commands. "Damn you, Solas. This better not leave a mark."

She took a deep breath and leaned against the field of wards, releasing the scream that boiled up her throat as her skin pressed against them. She reached through and caught hold of him, dragging him backwards out of the circle. He was heavy and limp and she grew increasingly frustrated until adrenaline kicked in and she was able to pull him back with one great heave. His head landed in her lap, lolling loosely like he was utterly comatose. The wards collapsed as soon as he crossed them and the agony ceased.

She felt for his pulse and found it steady and strong on his neck. He was breathing, but he did not wake. He was cold, too. And his skin was pasty and dry like he was dehydrated.

"Dorian, anything you can do?"

"Healing is not exactly my specialty, my dear."

"I know."

Dorian knelt at her side, passing his hand over Solas's prone form. He shook his head. "I...I can't tell what's wrong with him. There are no physical injuries to speak of other than some minor bruises and cuts."

“All right, in lieu of immediate help, we need to get him comfortable and see if we can get any water in him, at least. It's possible that he's gone into uthenera. Let's set up camp.” She looked up and smirked at Bull. “I'll need you to carry him.”

“Great, now I'm just your beast of burden,” Bull said, but his eye was twinkling. Carly and Dorian got out of the way and Bull hauled Solas into his arms, with far more care than she expected, all things considered.

They got up the first tent as quickly as they could and laid Solas on a thick bedroll that Carly had thought far enough ahead to bring. She was able to dribble water between his lips as the others finished up preparations, and she noticed that he still swallowed reflexively, so at least he wasn't just letting the water pool in his mouth. That would just lead to choking if he woke abruptly.

Wouldn't that be ironic, survived all this shit just to choke on a sip of water.

“What now, Boss,” Bull asked when she emerged from the tent to see that they'd gotten a fire going – certainly there was no shortage of wood – and a nug was roasting on it. She sat next to him and leaned on him for a moment, soaking in some of his strength. He tucked her close to his side, un-selfconscious about it.

“Now we might need an Elvhen.”

“I seem to have not packed one of those in my pocket.”

She snorted at the sardonic tone. “No worries, I did. Well, sorta. I just need an Eluvian that will take me to the Crossroads. From there I can get a message to the Sentinels.”

“You mean we could have gotten here that way without the need for a ship?” Dorian asked, somewhat sourly.

“No, I wouldn't have been able to bring all of you through the network. I can't navigate it, and to be honest, I don't even have a key to the one we have.”

“Been keeping secrets, Inquisitor?” Dorian arched a brow at her.

“Is it really a secret that I can't use our resident Eluvian?” she scoffed. “Secrecy of other kinds was necessary while he planned. Too many people in the know just leads to mistakes and leaks.”

Bull made a sound like agreement. Dorian stared at him. “What? That's the first rule of any espionage effort. Need to know basis can keep a mission from sinking.”

“Even from us?”

Carly shook her head. “I've been out of the loop for a while, so I don't know what kind of reaction there's been to his work here before he went into the Fade. So yeah, even from you. It's one thing to know what he was doing, it's another entirely to let anyone know how much of the Eluvian network he has control of. We still have enemies, you know.”

“I'll get in touch with Daisy about her Eluvian, assuming she still has it,” Varric said. “What now?”

“Post a guard rotation amongst yourselves. I'm going to try and find him in the Fade.”

“Can you still do that?” Hawke asked, finally breaking her silence on the whole thing.

“Not like I used to, but some. If he's there, I'll get him to find me. If not...” she sighed, “if not, we

fall back on getting an Elvhen here.”

“What can one of them do anyway?” Bull snorted.

“Either find him on their own or at least help me prepare the tea that will keep him alive until he finds his own way back.”

“How do you know one of the Ancient Ones can find him?” This from Dorian. Carly looked at him, wondering if he was asking for his own benefit or for everyone else's. She realized that not everyone had the breadth of knowledge she did about ancient elves.

“Because all the remaining Elvhen are Dreamers. Somniari. That's how they survived the Veil.”

“What, all of them?” Dorian was aghast. She wondered if he was thinking about the number of Sentinels in the Inquisition. The ability was so rare among modern humans and elves as to be considered nearly extinct. And all unknowing he'd been living among an entire troop of them the whole time they were at Skyhold.

“Yes, all of them.” She got up from the fire, taking a quick portion of the roasted nug and eating it from burned fingers. “All right. I'm off to dreamland. I'll see you all in the morning, hopefully with news.”

The rest shifted around, as if collectively uncomfortable with the notion. She went back to the tent and tried to pretend it was any other night on the road and she wouldn't have to struggle to sleep. She wasn't entirely successful, but eventually she did fall into the Fade.

In this spot, much like its waking world counterpart, it was bare of any signs of life or even surroundings. It was a gray mist that went on to the limits of her perception. She wasn't sure if that was because she no longer had the ability to manipulate it or if the reverberations of whatever it was he'd done had affected the area. In the distance was a brighter speck of light and she willed her body to move towards it.

“Solas?” she called, her voice both too quiet and so loud it echoed. The light began to shift, changing from a formless glare to the shape of a giant winged wolf. It grew smaller and more familiar to her as the wolf she'd seen before and then finally morphed into a man. He stepped up to her as if he could effortlessly cross the immeasurable distance that had been present and gave her a half proud, half smug smile, gleaming in his armor and fur. He tucked his hands behind his back, every inch the image she expected from Fen'Harel, reluctant mage god.

“Hello, vhenan. Well done. I suspect you have questions.”

A sound erupted from her, equal parts laughter and utter exasperation. She grabbed him by both wolf pelt and armor and shook him. He let her, the look on his face one of fond amusement. Then she yanked him close and kissed him as hard as she could. His arms came around her, engulfing her with both the layers of his armor and the overwhelming sense of power that he kept tightly leashed when he was with her. There was so much more of it than there used to be. She was breathless when she pulled back from the kiss. And he was still smiling.

“Dread Wolf take you, Dread Wolf. Your wards hurt like a sonuvabitch.” She cupped his face in her hand, taking the sting out of her chiding. “I've *missed* you, ma fen. And yes, I have questions.”

He looked around, seeing the empty Fade surrounding them. “I take it we are still on Sundermount.”

“Yes, and you're...are you in uthenera?”

“My clever vhenan. Yes, I am.”

“How will we wake you?”

“I will wake in my own time. My spirit must heal before I can return to my body.”

She kept a hold on him, afraid that if she let go he would disappear. He seemed to understand that and continued to hold her tight, too. “Dorian said you weren't actually injured. What happened?”

“That, my love, is quite complicated.”

“Is it safe to speak of here?”

“Yes. The Fade will forever be safe now.”

“Solas...what did you do?”

“I healed the world.”

“Tell me.”

Chapter End Notes

You didn't think I was going to let an opportunity to go by without using that damned line, were you?

Yes, Fen'Harel, we have a *ton* of questions.

The Bloodiest Hands

Chapter Notes

12/11/20

How we feelin' today, DA fans? Lamb's speculations will be in the end notes.

Meanwhile, the timing could not have been better for this particular chapter if it tried...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"I think it would be easier to show you," Solas said. He cupped his hands around her face, sliding them into her hair. She kept her eyes on his and watched the light grow in them, at once awfully familiar and yet very different from what she expected. They swirled like galaxies, like stardust, but she never lost sight of the depth of his irises, or the strands of blue, silver and violet that ran through them. "Watch."

The best way she could describe it was like being within his mind, watching the memory unfold as he had experienced it. The Veil parted for him easily and he stepped through it with Flemeth at his side, her regal face calm and assured of victory. They crossed the Fade in what seemed like a mere moment and suddenly they stood at the gates of the Black City, shrouded in such a deep absence of color that she couldn't even see the shape of it. She knew without having to ask that he'd pulled all of the Blight in the world to this place, forcing it across the Veil by whatever spell he'd used on the red lyrium to heal it.

"Begin, my Wolf," Flemeth said.

There was no sensation for Carly as she inhabited his memory, but she knew that he was drawing upon his power and the knowledge he'd gained to heal the city of the Blight, drawing it up and out of every crevice and seam. Slowly color began to bleed back into the structure, first pale and then rapidly turning gold and glittering as the Blight burned off like a layer of ash. Solas slumped when he was done, over-extended and exhausted.

"It is not enough," Flemeth said. "You will not be able to finish on your own."

"No," he replied, but the tone of it didn't seem to be agreement. It was denial of something else entirely. Flemeth smiled at him, maternal and knowing.

"I have lived and walked this world for more lifetimes than I dreamed I would, Fen'Ghilen. It is time." She held him up, turning him to face her. Carly could see it in her eyes, a terrible knowledge and acceptance. "Once I thought power was all that was needed to rule this earth. But it is not. My Wisdom tried to tell me, and I rejected him, corrupted him to Pride, as I was corrupted from justice to retribution. It took a mortal from another realm to show us both the error of our ways. To return you to what you were."

For a moment it seemed Flemeth could see into him, see *her* within him. The host of Mythal smiled gently, and Carly knew she was right. *She nudges when history requires it, sometimes she shoves.*

“Our time is past, Fen'Ghilen. This world belongs not just to the elves, but to all thinking beings. We resisted too long, and compromised too little. You may have removed my sigil from your skin, but you could never undo the bond that held you in my thrall, even in death.” She held a hand to his chest, still cradling his face with the other. “Take it now, and be free. Ar lasa mala revas. I am sorry, old friend.”

A blue green glow began, pouring off Flemeth and into Solas. His back arched from it as if it hurt, and Carly could no longer see what was happening. When he fell forward again, Flemeth was gone. He was alone.

He went into the City.

The Eluvians stood in a ring similar to how they were positioned at the Temple of Mythal. She could imagine them once as a busy intersection as mundane as any traffic junction. They were dark against the backdrop of gold, but it wasn't the darkness of inactivity. No, each one was filled to capacity with Blight growth, until it nearly reached through the glass to the frames. All but one. It was still corrupted, but it seemed to be halted before it could escape the mirror, allowing the impression of a figure to be seen in silhouette. It was barely visible like a shadow behind a curtain. Solas approached and there was a voice. The words were Elvish, but Carly had no trouble understanding them in his mind.

“You came back.”

“I did,” Solas said, his voice cracking with grief.

“Oh, my brother, my kin,” the silvery voice said. It was hard to see into the mirror, but the figure that dwelled within looked tall, stately, luminescent. The voice was soft and feminine. *Sylaise*. “I could not heal us, and you could not stop us. I have long sorrowed at this impasse.”

“I know,” Solas whispered. He placed a hand on the shimmering glass, and through his eyes Carly saw the imprint of the Evanuris of the hearth and healing as she reached for him.

“I have not much time,” Sylaise said. “Heed me, lethallin. Spirits we were once, spirits we can become once more. An echo of a memory.”

“It is a cruel fate.”

She laughed, gentle but chiding. “It is a merciful one. For you. And it is better than eternal death. The healer has the bloodiest hands, my brother. I would not have you carry these burdens anymore.” The mirror *warped* and Sylaise's image blurred further. “We are running out of time. I am rarely so lucid.” The hand returned, the outline of it backlit with such brilliance that the rest of her was lost in it. “Take this, my knowledge and power. Take it, Fen'Ghilen,” she commanded as he hesitated. “Release us into the Fade in peace and love and weep not for what we lost.”

“Will it work for all of you?” Even as he asked he raised his hand against the Eluvian again, absorbing Sylaise as she seeped through the glass in a flowing glow of blue.

“You can but try...” Her voice faded into a growl and the mirror grew dark. Like oily smoke the Blight regained control of her, twisting the brightness until nothing was left. Solas hissed through his teeth at the glass, still taking in her essence. For a moment it seemed he would not be able to pull away from it, but her power had been added to his and Mythal's and he prevailed.

He took a moment to center himself and Carly could tell his eyes flashed, bright and eternal. It was strange to experience from within, a feeling almost like becoming the light itself. The cloud held in

the mirror shrank until nothing was left but a spark of yellow, a tiny star. He let go of his hold on the Eluvian and drew the spark into his hands, cupping it like an egg. It hovered, small and shining and he smiled.

“Go be free, my sister,” he whispered. “You are a spirit of healing. Go.”

Carly watched and listened through him as he turned to each mirror in succession and repeated the process. She didn't know how long it lasted, there was no way to tell if he was condensing this version for her or if because time had no meaning in the Fade he wasn't aware of the passage of it. He had been gone for nearly two months, surely it had taken longer than the few minutes it appeared to.

You are a spirit of craft, he murmured as he released June.

You are a spirit of death, to Falon'Din.

You are a spirit of mystery, to Dirthamen.

Each one floated away as a wisp, a nascent expression that would surely grow into something she was more familiar with in her explorations of the Fade. They had no sentience, no intent other than their purpose. They were no longer mage kings that nearly destroyed the world, they were just...spirits.

You are a spirit of vengeance, to Elgar'nan.

He stopped at the final two Eluvians and through his memory of it, Carly knew grief took hold of him again. The first mirror was as dark as the others, the last had movement detectable within it. Roiling, like the coils of a serpent or the tentacles of a great sea creature. She could almost hear it. He took time to compose himself and absorbed Ghilan'nain from the living tapestry she'd made of her prison. *You are a spirit of creativity*.

He turned to the final mirror and pulled the essence from it. It seemed quicker than the others, either due to his overwhelming power or because he wanted it done as swiftly as possible. He held the glowing spirit a long time once it was free. It was as if he was reluctant to let this one go.

You are a spirit of the hunt, he said to Andruil as he released her.

Carly watched as he held a hand to his own body, drawing out the spark of Mythal that he now carried. He held it the longest and if he communicated with it, it wasn't with words she could hear. At last he opened his hands and released the small ball of Fade energy.

You are a spirit of justice.

He walked the empty corridors and halls of the restored Vir Ghil'an, his footfalls silent. In the center of the structure stood the plinth he'd used when he created the Veil. It looked the same, with the same lyrium spokes and undressed stone. He withdrew the idol from wherever he'd been keeping it and set it on the plinth. It hovered, vibrating slightly as it spun into position just like an orb would. She recognized these actions. He raised his hands to either side of it, not quite touching it. A glow formed between them, siphoning the collected power of the Evanuris into the lyrium. It began to spin, faster and faster until it was a blur. It lost its look of carved anguish and became only a shining blade. And still the power flowed into it.

The memory began to fragment as Solas's control over it faltered. Carly began to see from an outside perspective while simultaneously seeing it through his eyes. He grew, losing form as a man and becoming the wolf. But he didn't stop there. He grew larger still, looming over the spinning

idol, wings swept out for balance, hands turned to claws. He had turned distinctly draconic. If she could see his face, she knew there would be six eyes.

As if she conjured the image, she *could* see it. But where his alternate form had always been black and red, this was silver, the eyes flashing violet and blue, the color of his own. They glowed, blinding and incandescent. The power flowing into the idol did not wane for a long time. And then, all of a sudden, it stopped.

She could feel the weight of his form around her, alien yet comforting. It was shifting again, shrinking and disappearing, becoming the man she knew once more. She stood both within and without and watched him smile as he cast a final look around the place. He spoke no words, made no gestures. He simply held his hand over the idol and closed his eyes. The force of the explosion threw her out of the memory and back into the empty Fade with him.

“And now you know,” he said.

“That was...incredible.”

“It was a portion of their power. I have the remainder. Vhenan...” He looked *tattered*, as if this figure of him in front of her wasn't real. It was only a projection. “I need to stay in uthenera for now. I do not know how long it will take. You will not find me here, we must let this place heal and grow anew. I must tend to the spirits that fled before the blast. There is much to oversee. Do not look for me again. But know that I am with you.”

He pressed a kiss to her lips, lingering for a long moment, and then to her forehead. “Wake up.”

She jolted awake and saw Dorian sponging her face with a damp cloth. He smiled at her. “The dreamer returns.”

“Arglhh.”

“Quite,” he agreed cheerfully. He lifted her into a sitting position against his chest and helped her sip from a cup. Water had never tasted so good. “Before you ask, you slept for two days. We are still on Sundermount and I can tell you with absolute sincerity that we are all ready to leave if you are.”

“Yeah...” she managed. “We should...”

“Yes, I do believe we shall return to Kirkwall. You and Solas both need time to rest.” She nodded, feeling wobbly and weak. She tilted her head back and met Dorian's eyes. He smiled again, this time warm and soothing. “There is plenty of time for questions and answers, my dear. Once you recover.”

Chapter End Notes

All right, allow me to ramble.

First off, Solas needs a nap and a snack...and possibly a hug. No, apparently we really didn't want to see what he'd become. Big yikes all around. I'm keeping in mind that cinematic trailers rarely look like in-game representation and he probably won't look

that...awful. The more expressive body posture is nice though.

Next, for everyone cracking jokes about Tevinter being the cyberpunk capital of Thedas, y'all need to go back and read Luck in the Gardens again. That isn't fantasy neon, it's MAGIC.

Okay, the mural. I think the upper left hand figure is Ghilan'nain. She's the only one described as having long hair and that certainly looks like flowing locks coming out of the headdress/horns. Bottom left is Meredith, bringing our first red lyrium connection. Bottom right is Corypheus, the second red lyrium connection. Top right...not sure. I'd need to dig around in the meta files a bit. No spoons for that right now. I think the fact that the wolf's eyes are blue is significant. So is the fact that they're wonky af. The red maw doesn't concern me as much. I mean...you ever look instead the mouth of anything? It's red. That said, monster form dominating the scene? Absolutely, the Dread Wolf is the biggest thing you'll find in the Fade. I think there's no way to stop him now. I think the best we'll be able to do is contain the fallout.

Speculations -

I think Varric, and possibly Dorian, will serve as advisors to the new protag. I never thought the protag would be the Inquisitor again, the franchise hasn't worked that way game to game yet, I didn't expect this was going to be an exception. I think we WILL see Inky again, much the way we saw Hawke in DA:I. V: Oh, we need to deal with Chuckles? I know someone that can do that.

I think the focus will be more northern Thedas, and it's about damn time. Tevinter, Nevarra, Antiva...maybe even Rivain or the Anderfels. That would be nice.

Qunari around? Yes. Pretty sure that magical bow wielding warrior was Qunari. Those were horns on their head.

I have a feeling that figure idly swirling their glass around is an Elvhen, and that cityscape is Somewhere In Elvhenan. The flowy clothes and very 'castles in the sky' look give it away. Plus the glass in the windows is reminiscent of the style you see in elven ruins.

And that's all I've got right now. Feel free to fill my inbox with your own meta (and thoughts on the chapter too, lol). Or come yell with me on tumblr. I'll be around.

We've also hit 150K words. Woohoo!

Elegant Solutions

Chapter Notes

12/15/20

Cameos, cameos everywhere.

Carly looked around the empty house with a critical eye. It was ostentatious and far too large for just her and Solas and she wondered if Varric was pulling a fast one on her. She turned to him, leaning against the banister of the stairs, watching her.

“What do you think?”

“I think you're looking for a way to collect property taxes on the Inquisitor.”

His grin was wry. “Maybe. Mostly, I'm looking to not have it vacant. Doesn't look good for the neighborhood, you know.”

“Varric,” she said sardonically. “You do know I won't actually be living here, right? I already have a huge castle.”

“Call it a winter home, then. Somewhere to stay when the whole Inquisitor thing gets to be too much.”

“You just want us to be neighbors.”

“Well, I wouldn't complain.”

It was true, this house was within sight of the Amell estate. Carly shook her head and held out her hand for the key he was walking across his fingers like a coin. “Fine. Barely two weeks into my first visit and you're kicking me out. Hey, don't I get a fancy title with this bullshit too?”

“Yeah, actually you do. Bran's gonna shit himself, but I don't care. And I'm not kicking you out,” he groused, patently falsely, “I'm just taking care of unfinished business.” He gave her an exaggerated bow too full of flourishes for her to take seriously. “Comtesse Lavellan, welcome to your Kirkwall home.”

She gave him an equally exaggerated curtsy. “Why, thank you, Viscount Tethras.”

She debated on moving Solas from the viscount's manor to their own, but decided against it. He hadn't so much as stirred in the two weeks they'd been there. Abelas had sent a recipe for the sustaining tea by way of raven from Skyhold, so at least Solas wasn't wasting away. But the new house was too empty and if something went wrong, she knew Varric's staff were on hand and nearby. Besides, she didn't really want to move in without telling him that they'd scored a noble house in Kirkwall. She rose from the bed and kissed his brow, taking note that his skin was cool. She piled more blankets on him. It was only then that she noticed the shadow across his scalp. She brushed her real fingers across it and smiled.

“Well look at that. You have fuzz,” she whispered, leaning in to look at the stubble on his head. She snorted to herself, seeing the predominant red. Once it grew in, it was likely to be a deep auburn, like his eyebrows. “It’s a lovely color, ma fen.”

I removed it as a sign of my mourning for Mythal, she recalled him saying when she teased him about being bald. Evidently, releasing her back into the Fade as a spirit meant he no longer mourned. She wondered how different he would look once it was well grown in and whether or not she’d ever get used to it. She placed another kiss on his forehead and went to get dressed.

“Hey, Peaches,” Varric called to her as she came down the stairs on her way to the dining room. She could hear soft conversation with voices she didn’t recognize. She stepped into the room and saw Bull, Dorian, Dagna and Sera watching Hawke be enveloped in the embrace of a smaller woman. She looked again and saw a familiar face she hadn’t dreamed of seeing again standing by the two women, his face haggard, but happy.

“Warden Stroud,” she said.

“Inquisitor,” Stroud said with a nod in her direction. He looked...different. Aside from the exhaustion, that is. She couldn’t immediately place it.

“What are you doing here?”

“We’re cured,” said the young woman clinging to Hawke. Carly got a good look at her face – oval with soft features like Marian, eyes of the same brilliant sapphire blue.

“Bethany, I take it?” The young woman grinned, the carefree smile of one delivered from a terrible fate. Carly looked back at Stroud. “What’s happened?”

“Viscount Tethras told me that the Fade has been breached, and an ancient evil has been laid to rest. Putting the clues together, I would say that whatever that apostate friend of yours did there has cured the Blight. The entire Order has stopped hearing either the Calling or the darkspawn. I sent a troop into the Deep Roads, and they returned empty handed. They found no trace of living darkspawn as far down as they could safely travel.”

He seemed at peace with his words, but there was an undertone that was mournful. She asked, carefully, “What aren’t you telling me?”

“Not everyone made it,” Bethany said. “Younger Wardens like myself are fine, but the older ones...those that were already hearing the Calling...they didn’t survive. Others, like the Warden Commander,” she nodded to Stroud, “were ill for many days. He is still too weak to travel, in my opinion, but he wanted to see me home.”

“It was the least I could do,” he said to Bethany.

Carly sat heavily into a chair at the table, thinking the details through. Solas had not said a single thing about his plans to heal red lyrium having anything to do with also curing the Blight as a disease. Sure, it made sense, but it was altogether more altruistic than she expected from him, considering how he felt about the Grey Wardens.

“How many were...lost?”

“Perhaps two thirds of the forces that had served for more than a decade. All the recruits and those Wardens who have only served for a few years survived.”

“You came here from Weisshaupt? How is the land?”

“It's hard to say,” Bethany said, taking over as Stroud began to look like he needed to sit down. She left her sister's embrace and pushed him into a chair. There was something very intimate and comfortable in the gesture, but in a *familial* rather than romantic way. Carly heard Bethany whisper to him that he needed to conserve his strength. Then she turned back to face Carly. “Call it a gut feeling, but the land seems healthier. More alive.”

Carly looked around the table, seeing the expectant faces of her companions and the absolute joy on Hawke's. If their parting had been anything like the game, having her sister back must be like a miracle to her. Carly was suddenly inundated with the realization that the Inquisition would have to make a statement about this. All over Thedas, people were going to notice the absence of the Blight, the cessation of darkspawn attacks and the fact that they weren't dreaming all at once.

“First things first,” she said, getting up to pace as she thought. “We need to do some more testing of known locations where the Blight has affected the land, see if darkspawn are gone everywhere. I'll need to put together a public proclamation about it.” She stopped and looked at Varric. “Guess I will be needing that huge ass house. The Inquisition is going to have to move here for now.”

He gave her a look, both sour and anticipatory. “I'm sure the Seeker is going to love that.”

“Oh shit, remind me to tell Cullen he can stay put in Skyhold. Hold down the fort for me. I'm not going to make him come back here. But I need everyone else. Josie can help me with the logistics. Charter's little birds are fast and effective.”

“And I have my own network too, Peaches.”

She nodded. “Right.”

“Actual first things first, my dear,” Dorian announced. “You need to sit down and have some breakfast. You look like you're about to fall over.”

It took another two weeks of travel, spying, researching and note taking, but they got it all done. There was no more active Blight to be found anywhere above or below ground. What little they *did* find was decaying rapidly to harmless dust. Carly made an announcement from Kirkwall, sending out representatives to the heads of state in all the other nations of Thedas to spread the word. The Inquisition had cured the Blight. The Fade had been breached and a great evil defeated. No one needed information they wouldn't believe anyway. Although she heard rumors of Fen'Harel's name in the markets in both Lowtown and Hightown. That was fine. She'd always guessed she wouldn't be able to keep that under wraps for long. She suspected Varric had begun it, since there were plenty of details but no mention that Fen'Harel was actually an elven apostate by the name of Solas, currently comatose in the Viscount's mansion.

In the meantime...

“What will you do now?” she asked Stroud, sitting with him in the garden of the mansion, enjoying what little sun got through the clouds of smoke from the furnaces of Lowtown.

“The Order will most likely be retired, and the Wardens will return to whatever their lives were before.”

She raised an eyebrow at him. “And those that were petty criminals before? And what about the age old rights of conscription?”

“I admit, I haven't thought it all through.”

“You know, the Wardens always stood for the greater good. There's no reason to stop doing that just because you don't have the Blight to worry about. Being a Warden offered many a way out of a life that was otherwise horrible. Mages could escape from sentence in a Circle, criminals could start over again and regain some pride and self worth. You command a formidable army, and you were a Chevalier before you were a Warden. Keep that part. There are other things to defend Thedas against than just the Blight.”

“You are expecting the Qunari to begin another conquest, aren't you?” he asked, his eyes steady on her.

“Sooner or later. It's inevitable with them.” She looked around the garden, enjoying its slice of peace in a city that boasted too little of it. “Countries like Orlais and Nevarra and the Anderfels haven't felt the effects of the Qun on their doorstep the way Tevinter and Ferelden have. Rivain and Antiva have been conquered how many times? The rest would rather squabble among themselves than band together to fight back. A unified standing army might make the Qunari think twice about invading.”

“You are perhaps correct, Inquisitor.”

“It's ultimately your decision. Doesn't sound like anyone else in a position to argue is here. But you have the Inquisition's support. New treaties can be written to reflect the change in direction. It's worth considering.”

“It is. I will put my mind to it. Perhaps I can steal your Ambassador away for a day or two to come up with some drafts.”

“I'm sure we can work that out.”

“Thank you, Inquisitor. This is twice that you've saved us.”

She gazed at Stroud and smiled. “No thanks are needed. Thedas deserves some peace and quiet. Sometimes all that takes is a small change. Sometimes it takes a large one. There's been so much chaos, having something remain steady, and for all intents and purposes the same, is good.”

“Yes it is.”

There Is Sweetness In the Waking

Chapter Notes

12/18/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

She woke as soon as she felt the shift in his breathing. It was dark in the room, probably the middle of the night. Wasn't that always the way? He was staring up at the ceiling when she turned over next to him, still mildly uncomfortable being on the 'wrong' side of the bed. No wonder she'd been sleeping so light.

“Solas?”

He took a deep, experimental breath and blinked several times. “Where are we?”

His voice was rusty from disuse, scratching raw in his throat. Still, it was good to hear him after so long. He'd been in healing uthenera long enough that his hair wasn't stubble anymore, but nearly an inch long. It was starting to curl on itself. She levered herself up onto an elbow and looked down at him. “We're still in Kirkwall. Varric and Hawke's estate.”

“How long...?”

“Hmm, about a month? Thereabouts? I haven't been keeping track of the days lately. I've been busy dealing with the aftermath of your...uh, apparently all encompassing cure.”

“I feared it might be longer.” He smiled wryly at her words, then made a disgruntled face, scrunching up his nose and smacking his lips. He seemed too weak to do more than roll his eyes at her but his expression was plain. “Tea?”

She gave an unapologetic shrug. “Didn't know how well you were coping there in the Fade. Desperate measures were required.”

His body shook as he laughed silently. His hand trembled but he was reaching for her. She laced their fingers together without thinking that it was with her left hand. He frowned at the feel of the hard ceramic. She pulled her hand from his and held up her arm so he could see it.

“Carly...” He sounded so utterly devastated that it hurt and she had to bite her lip before he saw her sympathetic tears.

“Hush now. I told you long ago it was all right.” She leaned in and pressed a kiss to his cheek. “Dagna made it and enchanted it with one of the Sentinels.” She wiggled the fingers, all of them now obeying her command perfectly. She could even make a fist. “It took getting used to, but I'm almost back to normal. I'm not a fan of sleeping in it, but with you all out of commission, I need to be able to...”

“How much?”

“Did I lose?”

He barely nodded. She sat up in the bed and pulled the straps off her shoulder and upper arm where the prosthetic was harnessed to her. She eased out the stump of her arm from its sleeve and held it up. The bright blue seam of the embedded lyrium glowed in the darkness from her puckered skin.

His fingers reached for the stump, shaking with effort. She let him touch it, hissing sharply as he made contact. He gave her a worried look. "It's all right, just sensitive. No one's touched it in...a while. And the surgery site is still healing, really."

She watched a tear track down the side of his face to his temple. "When?"

She shifted around in the bed so she was laying against him again. With her good hand she wiped the tear away, her touch as gentle as his. She knew her words would not be, but he wanted the truth, and he deserved to hear it. "It started the same day you left Skyhold. My best guess is that you were still exerting some will over it, and when you were out of range, it stopped. Dorian had to...he used negation spells to keep it from taking more. Abelas stabilized it later."

"All this time..." More tears rolled from his eyes. She caught the ones she could. He took a shuddering breath. "You did not want me to know."

"Nope, I didn't. Nothing could take precedence over what you needed to do. Not even me. I knew as soon as you took the Anchor that you couldn't dip anymore."

"And you let me leave with a smile on your face."

"I did, and I won't apologize for it. I even made Abelas and the others promise they wouldn't tell you if you contacted them. If you'd known, you would have come back. The Evanuris would still be a threat. So would the Blight." She smiled at him, soft and sad. "Sometimes terrible choices are all that remain. And sometimes sacrifices for the greater good are necessary."

"You have sacrificed enough, when, for me." It seemed to take all his strength to get the words out, and he panted as he collapsed the few inches he'd risen from the pillows.

"Solas, I always knew this would be the outcome. I'm not angry, I'm not going to ever hold it against you. I knew where this road ended." She sat up again and reattached the prosthetic, sliding her forearm into the protective sleeve of it, feeling the lyrium in her arm connect to the lyrium in the construct. She waited until she could 'feel' the fingers and used both hands to buckle the straps back on her shoulder. He watched, still pained on her behalf, but unable to deny her dexterity with it.

"Ir bellanaris abelas," he said, struggling against his tears.

"I know. And before you ask, the lyrium in my arm is safe. It's been refined and coated with a glaze of dawnstone so it doesn't actually interact with my blood. Dagna made runes, you see, for the arm to function." She held it up where he could see, even in the dimness of the room. The runes glowed faintly as the lyrium worked its magic. "I can feel with it, move the fingers and whatnot. It can even sense things like poison. When I'm not watching you sleep, or running the known world, I've been training with my bow again. At least I'll never have to worry about the strain of holding my arm bent with it again."

The sound he made might have been a laugh. It was hard to tell between the choked off sobs. She smoothed the straps so they were comfortable again and snuggled back into his side, once more lacing her fingers with his. He ran his thumb over the ceramic of her palm, taking in the texture and changes. It no longer flexed, of course, and their fingers didn't fit the same way anymore. But it was a fully functional hand, with articulated fingers and wrist joint. It was stronger than mere

metal. Any injury to it in this form would certainly have been worse if it was flesh.

Carly settled in so she could look at his face, now animated once more since he was awake. Slack and sleeping, he looked young and way too guileless. She preferred his resting wolf face to anything else. Not that she was seeing that now, he was still looking far too sorrowful for her liking. She shifted around some more so her right hand was free and traced the backs of her fingers along his jaw.

“Did I ever tell you that this was my favorite spot on you?” She leaned in as close as she could, ending up having to fling her arm up over his head to get it out of the way. She kissed the sharp corner of his jaw before nipping it gently with her teeth. She could feel his sudden intake of breath more than hear it. She smiled against his skin, letting her lips follow the angles of it.

“How long have you wanted to do that?” he asked, sounding much more like himself.

“About eight years.”

“You have only known me for three.”

“Oh no, ma fen. I've loved this face for *way* more than three years.” She chuckled and kissed his jawline again. “Every Lavellan character, remember?”

She leaned up enough to see his sardonic side eye on her. “And how many was that, precisely?”

“Ooh, seven...I think?”

He managed to turn his head to really look at her. His expression was hard to read in the dark. Contemplative, yes. Perhaps a little stunned. Certainly he was sufficiently distracted from his sorrow now. “Even though you knew that version of me would leave you, each and every time?”

“Yeah, even with that. It's the most heartbreaking romance in the game,” she said with a small smile. “But it's also the most *real*. It's hard to explain. It's beautiful and tragic. Star crossed. Hopeful.”

“Hopeful?”

“There's still hope to save you at the end. It hasn't played out there yet.”

“And for you, now?” A roguish light was in his eyes and she smiled more fully at him, relieved and happy to see it. She scooted closer still, a breath away.

“I *did* save you, didn't I?”

“You did,” he agreed. His tilted his chin up, a clear invitation. She closed that final inch between them and kissed him. Soft and gentle, with all the time in the world.

“Hello, ma fen,” she said when she pulled away.

“Hello, vhenan.”

By morning he was sitting up in the bed, supported with the extra pillows. At some point she'd fallen asleep nestled up against him, and must have slept hard enough that she didn't wake when he moved. Varric announcing himself before he came into the room did the job, however.

"How's sleeping beauty this morning?"

"If you are referring to me, Varric, I am awake," Solas said.

Carly sat up enough to register Varric's grin. "Good to see you, Chuckles. I mean that."

"Thank you."

"Did you know you have *hair*?" Solas raised a shaky hand to his scalp and ran his palm over it. He huffed a little but didn't comment. Varric grinned before he went on. "So, breakfast in bed for my two favorite lovebirds?"

"No tea," Carly mumbled. Solas snorted appreciatively.

"Right. How about coffee and some of the pastries Aveline sent?"

Carly smiled, wondering if she was only imagining the sudden interest from Solas. He had to be ravenous. She nodded absently and curled herself into him where he sat. It was horribly uncomfortable, but worth every aching part of her to feel him breathing and know that he was awake.

"It will still be some time before I am fully recovered," he said.

"I figured."

"However, you do not have to keep watch over me," he went on as if she hadn't spoken.

"You just want to hog all the goodies to yourself," she groused. He laughed and leaned over to kiss the top of her head where it rested against his arm.

"Perhaps."

"No chance, babe. I'm getting my fair share."

"If you must," he said with a teasing sigh. "It was worth an attempt."

She made herself more comfortable against him and realized that he was sitting up but not doing anything else. Normally when he woke before her he was reading. "You need anything?"

"No, it is enough simply to be here. I have been watching the light grow as the day begins, and watching you sleep. Listening to the birds. Somewhere nearby there are children playing."

"Soaking up the little things, huh?"

"Yes," he said warmly.

"I'm glad you're back."

"As am I, vhenan."

"Hey, I have something for you." She rolled over as best she could and fumbled at the nightstand for the mandible necklace. She dropped it into his waiting hand and treasured the smile on his face when he saw it.

"You should keep it, vhenan."

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Varric returned with Hawke in tow, interrupting any further discussion on the matter. Marian carried a tray with a cup of coffee and an assortment of delicacies sent by the Guard Captain. Carly pretended to make herself presentable, but they didn't stay longer than to say good morning and admonish them both to stay there. Bright sunshine slowly crept across the floor as they had a leisurely breakfast, although Carly noted that he didn't actually eat as much as she thought he would. And he didn't drink the coffee, leaving it for her. She wouldn't poke at him...yet. She knew she should really get up and get her day going, but she was too content to stay in bed with him.

At some point, he fell asleep again, and she joined him. They had a much more *vigorous* reunion in the Fade.

Chapter End Notes

Ir bellanaris abelas - I am infinitely/eternally sorry

Farewells and Warnings

Chapter Notes

12/22/20

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly and Varric walked through the house he'd given her, now newly refurbished. He seemed impressed with what she'd done to it in such a short time. She'd taken out all signs of Orlesian gaudiness and replaced them with soft Dalish accents, woven blankets and tall plants in pots. Each room had been repainted to a warm color that didn't clash with the woodwork. The only thing she hadn't replaced was the furniture. And that was only because she'd run out of time.

She and Solas had officially moved in, and she was fairly certain that under the cover of darkness, and with no small amount of magic, he'd moved an Eluvian into the spacious cellar. She knew for sure that each window of the lower level had been heavily warded with permanent runes and Sentinels had appeared overnight, stationing themselves unobtrusively as guards in a steady rotation.

"I've got more money than God, I should spend it somewhere," she snorted sardonically, returning to Varric's jab at her about doing it all so quickly. "Besides, it wasn't like I was doing anything else."

"Bold words from the Inquisitor who just made the Grey Wardens an independent standing army."

She shrugged. "*That* needed to be done. No point letting all that training and expertise go to waste. And I let Stroud work most of that out with Celene and Alistair and Anora. I just provided a neutral location for the talks. Well, and Josie's expertise."

"What's coming, Peaches, that has you so on edge?"

She looked down at her friend and sighed as she shook her head. The look he was giving her spoke volumes. Both of his worry and his suspicion that she was still keeping secrets. "Can't hide it, huh."

"I know you, Carly," he said, confirming her thoughts. "You say your store of foreknowledge is used up, but I wouldn't bet any gold on it."

"The Qunari are coming. In my version, they would attack during the Exalted Council. Orlais and Ferelden both get antsy about one person having so much power independent of their control. The timeline is right, but we're getting this victory celebration thing instead. Besides, I don't think anyone in either country is particularly eager to oust me from power after everything I've done. Well, everything the Inquisition has taken credit for doing. Not sure if that's a healthy respect for me or outright fear of my forces, though."

"It might have something to do with the immortal elven god rumored to be working within the ranks."

"Hmm, I wonder how *that* rumor got started," she retorted with a sidelong glance. Varric grinned. "Uh huh, called it."

“Hey, no one knows it's our Chuckles.”

“Let's keep it that way, Viscount Tethras.”

“I will.” They finished their tour and settled into the library comfortably. “What's on the agenda now, Comtesse?”

“Once Dorian heads back to Tevinter, I really should try to get back to Skyhold. I haven't been home in months and I'm sure Cullen is tearing his hair out.”

“Maybe, maybe not. He sent a very nice letter to us about the puppy.”

Carly smiled. “I know. Marian showed me.”

“And then it will be time to meet up in Val Royeaux,” Varric said with a sigh. “I hate it there.”

“Me too. But c'mon, we have more than earned this commendation and public acclaim. Hard to believe it's been two years since we defeated Corypheus.”

“You just want an excuse to dress Solas up again.” His expression was canny and knowing and she giggled at him.

“I get to dress myself up too.”

“Fair enough.” He wrapped his hand around hers, squeezing tight. “And you're right. If anyone deserves public recognition for saving the world, it's you. Just don't be a stranger once you get back to your Inquisitorial life.”

“I won't, Varric. I promise. This is our winter home, remember?”

“I get the feeling you still won't be using it much. I don't just start rumors, I hear them too. Word is the alienage population has shrunk and at least two Dalish clans haven't been seen on any trade routes.” He cocked his head at her. “What exactly is Chuckles up to? And don't feed me any bullshit about him having nothing to do with it. You told me he's a rebel. I'm expecting that he has *everything* to do with it.”

“You remember that whole get the orb back, deal with the Veil that's falling down and restoring elven prosperity thing he had planned?”

“Yes,” he said somewhat warily.

“We still have to do the rest of that.”

“I'm assuming that means without destroying the rest of the world while he's at it, right?”

“Right.”

“Tell me something, Peaches. How much of this would the rest of us have known by now without all your foreknowledge?”

“Not much. Solas would have disappeared just after Corypheus was defeated. Like immediately, that day. No one would know that he's Fen'Harel yet, or anything that he has planned. That wouldn't happen until after the Council.” She contemplated her ceramic hand. “I would still have the Anchor.”

“And it would be killing you.”

“Yeah.” She took a steadying breath and looked back to her friend. “And the Qunari invasion would be a complete shock.”

“But instead, we'll be prepared for it, if it happens.”

“Hopefully.”

“Do you wonder if maybe you've changed enough things that it won't? That they'll think twice about it because there isn't the chaos abounding the way there would be without you?”

“I do, actually. I wonder about it all the time. There's this thing in my world we call the butterfly effect. The idea is that a butterfly flaps its wings out over the ocean and the path of a hurricane changes. Mostly it means that averting some disaster over *here* means it will show up somewhere *there*. Or it will be different. Or some other fateful catastrophe will happen. I worry about how much I've changed, if I've fucked the world over worse by trying to stop it from falling apart.”

“Fate is a fickle bitch.”

“Yeah. And all we can do at this point is hope it works out.”

“That's not especially comforting.”

She squeezed his fingers. “Yeah, I know.” She gave him a steady stare and he met it. It was like he was waiting for her to say it. “We should start making preparations for the Qunari.”

“Yes, Peaches, we should.”

His adamance was...relieving. She smiled at him and they got to work.

Dorian and Bull were packed and ready to head out with an escort of Inquisition forces heading to their posts in northern Orlais. The soldiers would see Dorian to the Tevinter border, and Bull and the Chargers would be staying near the border in Antiva, keeping their ears to the ground. They would all be back, of course, in time for the victory celebration. Dorian had received special dispensation from Divine Victoria as a member of the Inquisition. They both were treating it as a symbol of diplomatic growth between the southern and northern Chantry. Plus it gave him time to put certain things in motion that he and Carly had discussed in private. They had a month to get ready for the celebration, plenty of time to check into their respective home bases and tie up loose ends.

Dorian pulled a chain from his pocket and dangled it in front of her. “Do I even need to tell you what this is?”

She smiled at him. “Nope. Sending crystal. You can bet I'll use it.”

“You had better. We have so *much* to talk about,” he went on with a flamboyant shrug and a secretive grin. Then he grew more serious. “Tevinter is many, many things. Not the least of which is missing my dearest friend.” He kissed her forehead and she felt more than saw his expression change as he looked over the top of her head. “Speaking of which...”

Slightly alarmed, she turned as Dorian marched across the entryway of the house to where Solas stood. He stopped and crossed his arms, fixing the elf with a penetrating stare. “We have not had a chance to speak of things, Solas. And *because* she is my dearest friend, and she loves you for some Maker forsaken reason, I have tried hard to forgive you for what you have done to her. I have not

been entirely successful.”

“Dorian...” Carly started, but stopped when Solas caught her gaze. It was smooth and clear, but mostly it was accepting. He turned his focus back to Dorian, and it appeared to be with all seriousness.

“You *hurt* her, Fen'Harel. I don't know if ancient elven gods have a concept of hell, but be sure you will learn it if you hurt her again.”

“Kadan...” Bull sighed.

“No, I will have my say. I don't *care* if you didn't know, or that it was for some blighted necessary reason. You hurt her, I was forced to be a party to it in order to save her life, and I will be watching to make sure it doesn't happen again.”

The entryway was taut with the tension of Dorian's outburst. Carly hadn't even realized he was so angry about it all. But Solas seemed to have been expecting it and when he spoke, it was gently.

“I will not ask for forgiveness I have not earned, Dorian. We are fortunate men to have the affection of such a remarkable woman. Even if you do not believe me, I promise that with all that is within my power, I will not hurt her again.”

Dorian harrumphed in his face, but his posture was less threatening. “See to it.”

And with that as his farewell, he turned and sauntered out the door. Bull watched him go for a moment before turning back to them. “That's been boiling up since...”

“I understand, Iron Bull,” Solas said. “He has a right to be angry. So do you.”

“I'm not angry, Solas. I know how war goes. Choices have to be made.” His eye landed on her, and it was unreadable. “And she made hers. I'll make sure he gets it out of his system.”

“Take care of him, Bull,” Carly said and hugged him a final time. “Keep him out of trouble. And yourself. I'm going to need the two of you.”

Bull nodded and took his leave as well. The door closed behind him and the house was finally quiet and empty. Carly turned to Solas and just looked at him, at a loss for words. He put his arm around her and held her close.

“It's all right, vhenan.”

“Is it? I wasn't expecting our farewells to be that...fraught. We have enough to worry about.”

He chuckled into her hair. “I cannot say that I was either, although I was expecting something. He cares a great deal for you, and I am certain he is conflicted about the role I have played in history as well as the one I have played in the present.”

“And you say *I'm* the compassionate one.”

“You are.” He tilted her head back so she was looking at him. “You have taught me well.”

Normally at this time of year I take some time off from posting. And I probably will for the rest of my WIP's. But considering I have all of this fic written and I'm basically just uploading it on a schedule, I'll be keeping to that. So Friday's chapter will still go up as planned. Call it a Christmas gift, since it's the longest chapter of the fic and spicy to boot.

To Soothe, To Burn**

Chapter Notes

12/25/20

May your day be merry and bright. Have some NSFW sizzle.

(On another note, wow, readers, just wow. 25K hits. Thank you so much!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The house felt empty, even though she knew Sentinels guarded each exit. She wandered through the lower level, dark without any lamps lit, magical or otherwise, and found Solas in the library, hunched over some text or other. It never stopped, it seemed. She stood behind his chair and rested her hands on his shoulders. He leaned back so he could peer up at her.

“Vhenan,” he greeted.

She ran her fingers through his hair, just long enough now to pull. His eyes closed and he made a soft, satisfied noise. “Have I lost you utterly to this library too?”

“Of course not,” he scoffed. She tugged on his hair just a little bit, just enough for him to take a sharp breath. His eyes flashed open and met hers. She grinned cheekily.

“You sure?”

So fast she didn't see it, he rose from the chair and then suddenly her back was against the far wall of the room, his arms tucked securely around her torso. Without thought she twined one leg around his hip, lifting herself automatically in his embrace. Then she realized just how far they'd traveled and she gaped at him. “Did you just Fade-step me across the room?”

His hands slid down her ribs to go below the hem of her shirt. She shivered when his icy fingertips brushed her skin. That was a yes. The look in his eye was beyond devilish and she hitched herself higher on him to tug his head closer to hers. When she was a breath away from his lips she stopped.

“Well,” she said softly, “I seem to have learned one way to get your undivided attention.”

“So you have,” he replied, arching an eyebrow at her.

Slowly she let her good hand trail up his arm and neck and back into his hair. He curled into her touch, like a cat. She scraped her nails across his scalp before clenching her fingers in the meager length of it. His reaction was instantaneous. He kissed her hard, pressing her further up the wall until her spine was flush against it. He plundered her, tongue sweeping along her bottom lip before filling her mouth. She couldn't breathe for a moment, but found she didn't care in the slightest. She turned her head to change the angle and her neck gave off a sickeningly loud but satisfying crunch.

“Ooh,” she gasped out. He broke away, startled. She turned her head the other way to see if it would crack again and realized his eyes were slightly horrified on her. “What?”

“Your neck...”

“Yes?”

“Did that not hurt?”

“No, it felt good. I've been waiting for it to do that.” She grinned at him. “Guess you relax me in all the right ways.”

He let go of her, letting her slide back to her own two feet. His expression turned crafty, but so lovingly warm her breath caught. “Hmm. I believe I can improve upon that.”

“Oh?”

He smirked and took her hand, leading her out of the library and up the stairs to their chamber. As soon as the door was closed behind them, he waved his fingers at the lamps and they all lit with a soft yellow flame. Carly stood in the center of the chamber and watched him move around as he undressed. In the low light, his features were a blend of sharp angles and shadows, his eyes looking so much darker than their usual silver blue. He was down to only his pants when he saw that she was still just standing there.

“Carly?”

“I love to look at you, you know that?”

“You have mentioned it, once or twice.”

She crossed to him, putting some extra sway in her walk, delighting at how his eyes followed it. “You're so damned lovely. It's completely unfair.” She trailed her fingers from the top of his tattoo down to the ball of his shoulder and arm. “These long lines that you hide under a hobo outfit, all this lean strength that always takes my breath away. Your singular focus that's both tempting and terrifying.” She trailed her finger along his jaw to the cleft in his chin, adding, “And then there's this.”

He was very still under her touch, his eyes on hers. His lips curled, but it wasn't a smirk. She remembered once telling him he was mathematically perfect. She wondered if he ever felt that she was joking about that, or if he'd known just how much she meant it.

“I could look at you forever, ma fen.”

A single breath shuddered out of him. It surprised her a little. Had no one ever told him just how gorgeous he was? She cupped the back of his neck and drew him down to kiss her again. A sweet meeting of lips that held back from the more ravenous edge they usually teetered on. His arms came around her tight, lifting her to her toes and she clung to him, humming a little happy sound. When they parted, he kept her there, their faces close enough to touch, their breaths mingled.

“In all my many years, no one has ever made me feel the way you do, vhenan.” He brushed his nose against hers before resting their foreheads together. “Ar lath ma.”

“Ar lath ma, Solas.”

He put her down and unbuttoned her shirt, wordlessly peeling it from her to plop on the floor before he moved around behind her to unhook her breastband. He dropped that too and she waited for his hands to cover her freed breasts, but he was still circling her. He reached for the buckles that held on her prosthetic. There, he paused and his face made a question. She nodded, caught up in his quiet mood. The buckles came open and he unwound the straps from her arm, tugging off the ceramic. He carried it to the dressing table and laid it down with something like reverence before

he came back to her.

“Take off your shoes,” he said quietly, almost purring. She braced herself against him while he let her and kicked them off one at a time. He smiled at her again and his hands slid down her body to her waistband, unlacing her leather leggings and pulling them off her hips. When she was finally naked, he placed a single kiss on the end of her nose and turned her bodily towards the bed, pushing her until she lay flat on her stomach.

“What are you up to, Fen'Harel?”

The gentle smile he'd been wearing turned wolfish but still sweet. “You said I relaxed you. And so I shall.”

He disappeared from her line of sight into the washroom and she raised herself up on her elbows in time to see him come back with the flagon of oil she used in her bath. Before she could ask, he dropped his pants to the floor, climbed onto the bed and straddled her hips. She felt a dribble of oil hit her back and jumped, making him muffle a chuckle under his breath.

“It's cold,” she complained.

“It will warm soon enough,” he said, teasing and light. She grumbled but didn't twist away from his fingers when they spread it across her skin. His long fingers pressed into muscle and bone alike. Healer's hands, artist's hands. He worked knots loose and smoothed across her skin from nape to waist, kneading and pressing until she was nearly boneless. Then he worked down her good arm to her fingers. She recalled him once massaging the Anchor and her hand around it. Funny to think of that night, when she'd been cold and he'd had her share his bedroll to keep her warm. Calling her out for being stubborn and lacking in self care. They had not even shared a single kiss then, although they'd shared plenty of flirtation.

He'd paused and she saw him from the corner of her eye as he shifted to her left side. “May I?”

“Yes,” she whispered. It was almost *too* intimate, the thought of his hands on her foreshortened arm. The skin was sensitive there, painfully so sometimes. His hands were slick with oil as he worked down from her shoulder to her elbow, his touch firm. He cradled the stump carefully, still firmly working the kinks from the muscles. She had tensed, preparing to feel the jolt of the nerves that still screamed for their missing ends, but he seemed to know exactly how much pressure he needed to overcome that sensation. Even at the surgery site his touch swept her skin with enough force to soothe and she went back to her boneless state of bliss.

He worked his hands back up to her neck, pressing and smoothing the tension from her until her head lolled on her pillow. Then he shifted himself lower, and his hands cupped her backside, firmly teasing out the small aches and pains she carried there from a life of always being on the go. She sighed happily and he huffed when he heard it.

“I should have done this sooner.”

“I won't complain if you *keep* doing it.”

“I shall.”

He paused for more oil and worked down her legs, each thigh, each calf, down to her ankles. And then back up again. By now her body was buzzing with both relaxation and need. She squirmed under his hands when they cupped her ass. His thumbs dug into the muscle at the joint at the top of her legs and she groaned as he spread her open with the movement.

“Solas...”

“Yes, vhenan?” His voice held infinite patience, and it made her burn for more.

“Touch me, please.”

“I am touching you.”

“You know what I mean,” she whined. He laughed under his breath and she felt his weight shift around as he climbed back up over her body. His hand stayed where it was, however, and even as his breath tickled along her ear, she felt his slick fingers slip between her legs.

“Like this?”

They sank into her without resistance, a measure of both how turned on she was already and how oily his hands were. She bucked at the pressure and spread her legs out so he had more room, a moan stifled in her throat. He stroked her gently, slowly. She made a complaining noise when he pulled his fingers away, but stopped as soon as she felt the pads of them against her clit. He pressed them there, rather than try to flick or rub against it. Without much forethought, she arched her hips into his touch with a hiss of pleasure. His breath ghosted along her ear just before his teeth closed on the tip of it, in time to his steady pulsing touch on her clit. She whimpered.

He'd grown hard in the time it took her to realize how desperately she had arched into his touch. She panted for breath, hovering on the edge of climax, knowing he was likely to keep her there a long time. It always made it sweeter when he finally let her fall. So she writhed and twisted against his hand, lifting to meet his plunging fingers, bending herself back when he stroked through her folds and lavished his attention on her nub.

“Ma isal'em?” he whispered in her ear, the combination of his voice and the words making her shiver.

“Yes.”

“Ma isem?”

“Yes,” she nearly shouted. Two fingers pressed into her again, stretching her out from the inside as he spoke. She was so close.

“Ma isa dana? Ma daral?”

“For fuck's sake, Solas...please...” He withdrew his fingers and traced them against her mound, a sweeping flourish that reminded her all too much of him casting sigils. She held her breath, only to have it rush out of her when he laid his weight on her, his legs forcing hers wider. She could hear the rasp of skin on skin and then she felt his cock press against her opening, sinking into her slowly, inch by inch. She lifted against him, her hips held at a nearly painful angle, her legs already shaking from trying to hold herself up.

He didn't stop pressing against her until he was fully seated, his hips tight against her backside. He flexed within her and she jolted, falling back to the bed and making him pull back. He laughed in her ear and pulled on her hips until she was off the bed again, then stuffed a pillow under her to rest on. Then he pushed back into her heat with a slow glide. A burn began in her core, licking tendrils of heat outwards from where they were joined to her clit and even further into her belly. Each long, slow stroke raised it higher, even though his actual touch didn't reach.

“What did you do?” she gasped out as he sank into her again, the final push sending splinters of

aching heat out through her whole body.

“Ar tel'atha lasem,” he murmured in her ear. He pulled back and thrust into with a little more force and the burn intensified, blinding and hot. Again and again he did it, and each time her cries grew a little louder. He bunched the pillow under her more securely and angled her hips higher and pushed so deep she could feel the pressure on the back of her pelvic bone and she shattered. Her orgasm thundered in her blood, racing from her scalp to her toes and she keened with it while he murmured things in her ear she was too far gone to hear. Her body clenched on him and it was like a feedback loop, one peak climbing seamlessly into another with barely a breath between. She pushed back against him now with each thrust, each one a little more ragged, a little harder, a little deeper.

She was practically on her knees now and raised up on her elbows to look down her body where they were joined. He curled over her, hand sneaking between the pillow and her body. His fingers slipped against her clit and she whimpered helplessly as he drove her over the edge again, coming so hard she couldn't breathe. Only then did he pound into her, holding her hips hard in his hands, slipping still on her skin with the remnants of the oil. With a shout, he spilled into her and they collapsed together to the bed, thoroughly boneless, the pair of them.

He withdrew from her body with a slide of fluids and she caught his arm before he could roll off her. His weight was a comfort, made her feel cherished and safe. He tucked himself around her so she could still breathe and pressed a line of kisses along the edge of her hair.

“Are you relaxed?” he asked, finally switching back to the Common tongue.

“Yes.”

“Good,” he whispered.

Chapter End Notes

Ma isal'em? - Do you need me?

Ma isem? - Do you burn?

Ma isa dana? Ma daral? - Do you need to shatter? Are you going to?

Ar tel'atha lasem – I made a connection (lit. joining given)

Courtesy of Fenxshiral's Project Elvhen

I may be slow to reply to any comments, since it will be several busy days for me with the holiday. But I will get to them all, I promise.

How Small the Weight of One Man's Sorrow

Chapter Notes

12/29/20

Angst alert...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Skyhold welcomed them home. It was something in the air that felt lighter, easier in her lungs as they rode through the gate. It was in Cullen's face as he greeted them, the Mabari pup at his heel, sitting so pretty but nearly vibrating with the need to jump and bark. It was in Ava's smile as she took care of them all with quiet competence. She had proven to be a good steward in Carly's absence. It was in the very stones of the keep, cool and rough edged, but solid as ever under her fingers. It took hours to settle back into place, to unpack and direct and grab a quick bite and find some time to just *breathe*.

And when she did all those things, and the realization that they were home had really sunken in, she realized she hadn't seen Solas since they arrived.

Cole appeared at her side, his face wearing a worried expression. "The old pain. He hurts. It's too big for me. I can't find the words."

"Sometimes words aren't what's needed. Where is he?"

"Simple, soft. More than a room, it's a home, where small symbols make sweeter sleep."

"Got it." She excused herself from everyone and climbed the endless stairs to their chamber. It was quiet in the room, but she saw the doors were open to the balcony. Sure enough, she found him there, looking out into the mountains with a faraway expression. It seemed that while she was soaking up the feeling of *home*, reality had crashed around him. "Solas?"

He inhaled deep of the cool air and turned to her, his face shadowed and haggard. It had been a long journey, and he was still recovering from uthenera. But it was more than that, she could see it plainly on his face, in the way he held himself. "Hello, vhenan."

"Just needing some time?" she asked carefully.

"Yes." The single word encompassed more than just his own tiredness, and more than the feeling of being overwhelmed after weeks of relative quiet in Kirkwall. There was something lingering in his eyes, something sad and wistful and full of pain.

"Centuries of work, finished in an instant," she said. "Am I close?"

"Yes."

She wrapped her arms around him, resting her head on his crossed ones where they lay on his chest. It didn't matter that he made no effort to hold her back. She knew what this was. The weight of finality. He'd done almost everything he set out to. For the first time in *millennia* he had no set goal, nothing but time. And nothing but memories to fill it. Few of them would be good. *How*

small the weight of one man seems balanced against the endless depth of memory.

"It's all right to grieve," she said softly.

"Is it?" he asked, sounding rather breathless. Like he was breaking apart before her eyes. She looked up at him and saw the battle he was waging with himself. Whether to let her see it, or to hold it in because he felt like he must. That he had *earned* this pain because of his mistakes.

"After everything we've been through, you think I don't know what it's like? I lost my whole world once too. I had to start over again. I had to accept that what I had I would never have again. That I can never go back."

"You shame me, vhenan."

"No. Please, I don't want you to blame yourself." She reached up and cupped his face in her hands, and he finally unfolded enough to cover them with his own. "I *understand* you. It's okay to let it out now."

"Have you?"

"It's not about me. My grief isn't anywhere near as big as yours."

A fleeting smile crossed his face before it vanished. Grooves had etched themselves into his face, between his eyebrows, around his nose and mouth. His face was always so expressive, even behind a mask of polite disinterest. Behind pride.

"There is nothing left of me," he whispered.

"There is nothing left of Fen'*Harel*," she corrected. "What is left is Fen'*Ghilen*, a walking spirit of wisdom and pride, the real savior of this earth, and my love."

"I have forgotten how to be him."

She stroked his cheeks with her thumbs, wiping away tears that slipped out without him noticing. "That's all right. I know he's in there somewhere. He'll come back when he's ready."

The sound he let out was both painful laugh and anguished sob. He pressed his forehead to hers and she held onto him tightly, as if he might break into pieces and float away. "Had you been the first person I met upon waking, this might all have taken a different path."

"I'm here now, and the path led exactly where it needed to. Come inside, ma fen. Let me hold you."

He didn't fight her, and once she got him into their bed, she curled up around his back, letting him cocoon himself in her embrace like a blanket. His hair tickled her nose and he was too long for her to spoon, but it didn't matter. Her arm went around him just fine, and he was content with it there, as if she alone could hold his heart in place.

"Do you need anything?" she asked, her voice barely a murmur between them. He tightened his hold on her, drawing her closer still.

"No vhenan. It is enough that you are here with me." In time, he slept, although she didn't. It was nearly dawn before she finally closed her eyes on her vigil over him.

“Abelas,” she greeted the Sentinel when she found him working on making new arrows. He paused in his fletching and gave her his full attention. Whatever he saw on her face must have been worthy enough for him to be apprehensive and he put the arrow down and folded his hands.

“Da’Fen, how may I serve?”

“I’m worried about Solas.”

“In what way?”

“He’s....” She waved her hands around, knowing *depressed* wasn’t enough to encompass the black pit of devastation he’d fallen into. It had only gotten worse until now he barely ate and never left their chamber. Cole was there almost all the time, often wordlessly, although sometimes she could hear him whisper to Solas.

She pulled over a chair and thumped into it. Abelas simply looked at her, his face contemplative. “He’s grieving. And I think I know why,” she went on when it was obvious the older elf wasn’t going to say anything. “He did what he set out to. For the most part. He healed the world, he finished Mythal’s vengeance. The only part he hasn’t done is remove the Veil. But...it’s like everything came crashing down around him as soon as we got back here. The weight of it is just too much. I’m half worried he’s going to shave his head again.”

“That leads me to understand that you know why he did the first time.”

“He told me it was to observe his mourning for Mythal. I think what he’s mourning now is...everything.”

“You would be correct. He sees himself as responsible. It is not the same for me. When I took up my duty I knew it would entail long periods of inaction punctuated with short periods of guardianship. You were hardly the first mortal to come to the Temple, although you were the first to treat it with reverence and respect. You did not loot or kill your way in.”

“Is that why you came here? Because I didn’t force myself through?”

“In part.” He flashed the tiniest smile and gestured to the jawbone hanging from her neck.

“Fen’Harel was with you.”

“So...what, you figured it was sanctioned?”

He chuckled, still a rather surprising sound from a man so serious. “In a manner of speaking. You were a curiosity. You knew things you should not. You walked ahead of him. He deferred to you.”

“So you were curious how a shem got Fen’Harel under her thumb?”

“Yes.” His vallaslin crinkled on his forehead, the gesture she thought of as him raising an eyebrow at her. She wasn’t sure if that was amusement at the idea of Solas allowing himself to be led by a mere mortal, or something a little more...intimate. It wouldn’t be the first time he’d shown off a glimpse of a wicked and bawdy sense of humor.

“And now you know.”

“I do. Da’Fen, he *is* mourning all that he has lost. We all are. For him, it simply goes deeper. He is also mourning what might never be.”

“A return to the glory days.”

“It is not just that. We who remain are immortal. Time does not march for us as it does for you. But we were born of flesh. He is a spirit. The memories he has collected are vast, they shape his being. He had a dream to restore that memory to reality. But to do so would have meant the end of this world. The end of mortals. He has chosen not to do it. He has yet to let go of the dream of it.”

“Time doesn't march for me anymore either. Mythal gifted me with immortality. She didn't want him to be alone, I think.”

Abelas nodded, as if this wasn't a surprise, either the gift or the knowledge that Solas feared dying alone. Once again, Carly felt his tacit approval of their pairing. “He will recover, Da'Fen, in his own time and no sooner.”

“So you're saying I need to just be patient, let him work out the tangles himself.”

“Indeed. You are Elvhen now.” The implication was clear. If she was immortal, she had nothing but time. Except that she didn't. They had an impending invasion to worry about. She wanted to give Solas space to work through his depth of grief on his own terms, but the simple fact was, she needed him.

Well, forcing it wouldn't solve anything either in the long run. And it was neither here nor there for the time being. She had as much as she could do on her own well in hand already. She smiled at the Sentinel elf.

“Thanks, Abelas.” She stood up and prepared to let him go back to his fletching. “Hey, is there anything I can do? For the rest of you? Some remembrance or memorial or...?”

“It is not needed, although I am grateful for you asking. We carry our past with us, and we can shape it in the Fade. That is all we need to remember it.”

“Okay. Let me know if there is anything you want. You're allies here, and you're all that remains of your people.”

“We are some, Da'Fen. We are not all. There are other temples.”

Carly nearly fell over. She hadn't once considered that the Temple of Mythal might not be unique. Once she did, she realized it should have been obvious. “Others? Could we wake them?”

“When the Veil is no more. It would be better for them, then.”

“I'll...keep that in mind.”

“Ma nuvenin.”

She cleaned both of their sets of armor, polishing the plate on his until it reflected her face in the lamplight. When she was done with that, she brushed the lint from their formal uniforms and folded them into a trunk to be sent on to Val Royeaux. It was nearly time to start heading that way for Divine Victoria's celebration. She packed his too, optimistic that he would be in a headspace to join her. Cole, in his usual non-linear fashion, had told her that she should.

She was sitting on the sofa with the wolf pelt in her lap, picking out snags from the fur when she heard Solas shift in the bed. From where she was sitting she could see him in the shadows, sitting up and ruffling his hair. It was endearing in a way she hadn't anticipated.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m obsessing and checking for fleas,” she said facetiously without thinking about it. She froze when she heard herself, how light and teasing her tone was. It seemed inappropriate when he was not in any mood for it. But she realized he was laughing. She turned to lean on the back of the sofa and watched him. He threw back his head and roared with it, nearly falling over into the pile of pillows.

“Come here, vhenan,” he said when he finally had his mirth under control. She crossed the chamber quickly, sliding up onto the bed next to him. He pulled her in close, tucking her against his torso. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. For what?”

“For reminding me that no matter how my memories weigh me down like stones, you are here, a light to return to. You are a gift to me.”

She snuggled close, wrapping her arms around him. “I’ve been so worried about you.”

“I know.”

“I love you.”

He pressed a kiss to her hair and held her tighter. “I know that too. Ar lath ma, vhenan.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written in August. I’m pointing that out because at the time I had a pair of personal tragedies head the list of what had already been one of the worst years of my life. My marriage of 13 years ended, covid-19 upended the whole world, my country literally became a burning disaster. My favorite among my mother’s cousins died suddenly the same week my parents had to put down their cat who was 17, and I was over a hundred miles away from them. I was acutely depressed as a result. This chapter took a long time to write. Partly because I was digging deep into my own swallowing darkness to give Solas room to have his. And partly because I just wasn’t in any shape to function creatively.

But I got through it. I have survived 100% of my bad days, and so have you, dear reader. Friday will see us into a new year and even though it won’t magically make everything better, it’s a fresh start just the same. I will see you all there.

Hubris

Chapter Notes

1/1/21

Happy new year! Have some totally made up headcannon glitter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What were you like?” Carly asked. “Before all of this?”

Solas lifted his head from her chest and looked at her. They were in bed, laying in a complete reversal from how they usually snuggled together. He was sprawled out between her legs, his shoulders burrowed into her belly, his head on her breast. She reclined against the pile of pillows, letting her hand wander over him as it pleased, stroking his skin, fingers combing through his short hair. He seemed to be loving the attention and she resolved to make it more of a habit.

“I thought my Earth Dalish knew all there was to know of me?” he teased.

She made a face at him, equally exasperated at him and utterly relieved to see him past the worst of his black grief. “Headcannons don't count. I want to know how you really were, before the Veil, before rebellion and impossible decisions. What was ma fen like when he was young and cocky?”

“*What* is a 'headcannon'?”

She snorted. “It's an idea based upon lore. Basically, if you tell two people the same bunch of information, but they come at it from different perspectives, they'll have different ways they interpret that information and arrive at possibly very different conclusions. And in the absence of confirmation as to which one is right, they grow and become huge theories of how a person might be, what they think, how they would act.”

“Such as?” He balanced his chin on her and searched her face. She threaded her fingers into his hair and cupped the back of his head, holding him in place.

“That you were a bit of a party animal in Arlathan and that it led you to get into trouble.”

He raised an eyebrow at her. “And how do you arrive at this conclusion?”

“In the game, there's banter between companions. The player learns a lot about the backstory of each one based on whatever banter is being used. You, in particular, go to great lengths to keep much of yourself private, but there is a funny bit where you make reference to being young once.” She cocked an eyebrow at him. “Sera asks if you ever pissed magic by mistake, and you stumble a bit on the answer. Between that and how...tipsy you get at the Winter Palace, there was a theory that you didn't often *indulge* anymore, but at one time, you did.”

He snorted softly. “Well, that is...accurate.”

“I'm not sure I really want to know now,” she said, giggling. “There's another one, between you and Thom. Where you talk like old men about the horrors of war. It's before we knew he wasn't Blackwall. Then you say something about how we should all have seen you when you were

younger, hot-headed and always ready for a fight. Were you really like that?"

"What do you think?"

She flicked the end of his ear at his evasion. He grinned at her. "I think I can see it. In the time that I've known you for real, you've definitely had a...pugnacious side."

He settled in against her again, his arms going around her waist, burrowing beneath her to splay his hands across her back. She could feel his breath on her rib cage, nearly tickling her. "I believe you would have found me impossible at times, if you had known me when I was young. I began my consciousness as a spirit of wisdom, but that only means I was voracious for knowledge and impatient to obtain it. The smallest impediment in pursuit of a goal would lead me to towering rage, and the range of topics I engaged in was wide and varying."

"So you're saying you were like a toddler having tantrums?" she laughed.

"That is harsh, vhenan."

"Hmm, sounds accurate though."

He nipped her skin and made her jump. "Perhaps." He smoothed the spot he'd bitten with a kiss before continuing. "I did learn many things, however."

"What changed?"

He was quiet for a moment before answering, his arms almost too tight around her. When he let her go, he shifted them around so she was laying flatter and he was more comfortable using her as a pillow. "The binding of a fellow elgar'venathe."

"Oh."

"She was a spirit of curiosity. She worked with Ghilan'nain often, helping her flesh out ideas, see new avenues of study. The thrill of discovery drove her, the end product rarely as satisfying as the path it took to get there."

"What was her name? Is it all right to ask?"

"Of course. Her name was Ise'lean. We were both new to physical bodies. She was curious, and I was always in search of new things to learn. Ghilan'nain cared nothing for our affair, it did not interfere with their work, nor was I involved with her at the time. No, it was Andruil who took more issue with it."

Carly wasn't sure what to say. She'd never asked about his relationship to either of the Evanuris, nor had she ever dared to inquire about any other relationships he might have had in the distant past. She knew there had to have been some. No one lived thousands of years and didn't have *experience* in one form or another. But he'd just dumped a whole boatload of information on her in a few words and she knew her hand stilled on him in shock. He looked up at her again.

"Does it bother you?"

"No, it's just...that isn't something that's ever been confirmed."

"Ahh, I see. Back to headcannons, are we?"

"Well, I always thought maybe there was something with Ghilan'nain and Andruil. I just didn't

know it was...what was it?"

He smiled crookedly. "Would you believe that I was formally bonded to Andruil?"

"I might, yeah. I imagine she was a very different person before the Void."

"She was. Temperamental always, but once she had great love of the land, respect for its creatures. She was both bright and playful." He looked distant, remembering the painful past. But he didn't shy away from it. "The madness of the lyrium turned that to malevolence. She became paranoid and jealous. Ise'lean was caught in the middle."

"What happened to her?"

"Andruil bound her will, corrupted her before she was fully invested in her physical form. She became cruelty itself, her once innocent wonder turned to the discovery and exploration of torment. We parted ways, not kindly. I broke my bond with Andruil, although that was many years later. In truth, my liaison with Ghilan'nain played a role."

"Was that revenge?"

"Perhaps in part. I wanted Andruil to feel what I had, betrayal and hurt. She would not face her own complicity in her actions. While I played one against the other, Ise'lean was set loose among Andruil's people to do with as she pleased. In the end...I was forced to kill her while aiding their escape."

"Solas!" Carly gasped. "Are you telling me you had to kill your own ex-girlfriend?"

"What remained of her was not the spirit I knew. She was...beyond my help any other way."

"I'm so sorry, love."

"It is the past, vhenan. I have no fear of you knowing it, nor does much pain remain of it."

"Still..."

He shifted around against her again, his face serious. "You asked what I was like before. I was often callous, frequently arrogant and by the time Andruil was driven mad from lyrium poisoning, I was usually highly intoxicated in order to stand the sight of her. You once told me that I had lived a life of privilege without realizing it. I *did* realize it. I knowingly walked away from it because my privilege was not enough to keep a village of elves, who bore no fault other than to live in Andruil's lands, alive during the rampage of a murderous elgar'venath. I was equally at fault for their torture and deaths, or at least, I did nothing to prevent it. Facing my own complicity was hard, but enlightening. I determined that I could not remain such."

"Andruil was the first one to call you Fen'Harel, wasn't she?"

"Ghilan'nain was," he corrected. "She thought perhaps she might shock me into recanting my disavowal of Andruil, who had supported her and raised her to the status she enjoyed. Instead, I left Suledin Keep and set off on my own. For near a century I wandered. I saw firsthand the suffering of the People under their 'gods'. Eventually, Mythal called me to return to Arlathan, to be her guardian and general. By then...the others were already conspiring against her. And I was beginning my rebellion."

"And it all went to hell."

“Andruil was angry, angrier still that I had been forgiven my neutrality in the many petty battles that existed among the Evanuris. I think she hoped I would be blamed when Mythal was killed, that I would also die and thus clear any challenger from her supremacy.”

“How did you avoid it?”

“She was careless. I gathered evidence against her, kept it hidden for future use. Of course, the time when I might have used it had passed. Whole nations of the People had rallied behind her, either willingly or from abject terror of the alternative. Her depravity and calculating cruelty against the human tribes first setting foot on these shores won her more followers who feared to displease her rather than from any love for her.”

“Did you always act alone in your rebellion?”

“Not at first. There was a schism. Sylaise saw her sister for what she was, and aided me in freeing slaves. June fortified my strongholds to keep them safe. Dirthamen held my secrets as his own. In the end, they all fell to the Blight and were no longer able to help. I went into hiding, growing my forces slowly and patiently. I hoped to free enough that open battle could be possible. But the Blight was too strong for me to combat. The people I had freed would be slaughtered, the land itself infected and destroyed. I had to consider other options.”

“Imprisonment and the Veil. And the trickery to pull it off.”

“Yes.”

“I'm sorry, Solas. I can't imagine what it must have been like to live through.”

“Now it is done,” he said firmly, as if he was still convincing himself of it.

Carly stroked his hair and held him tight. “There's something Cole says to you, about how you didn't do it to be right, you did it to save them. It goes back and forth for a while and eventually the player can ask what you're talking about. You say it was a mistake, made by a much younger elf who was sure he knew everything. But then Cole says something else. Something I don't know if you'd believe even now, but I sincerely hope you do.”

She tipped up his chin and made sure he was looking at her. “You weren't wrong. I know you feel like you destroyed the elves, that every horrible thing that's happened to them in the last thirty eight hundred years is your fault. But if you hadn't created the Veil, if you hadn't locked the Evanuris away, there might be no elves at all. There might be no land to call Thedas.”

“You can't know that.”

“And you can't pretend to know otherwise. You made a choice, one that was justified if not completely necessary. I don't know if there's some great plan at work, or if shit just happens the way it happens and there's nothing we can do about it. But I know this: if you hadn't made the Veil, I wouldn't be here. And I can tell you that there is nowhere else in all the universes that exist that I'd rather be.”

“Ma vhenan. I love you so.”

She smiled at him, cradling him in her good arm. “I love you too, ma fen. Always.”

Elgar'venathe - walking spirit, a term for a spirit who has taken on a physical body
(gratefully borrowed from queenofkadara)
Ise'lean - She Burns Bright

Forewarned Is Forearmed

Chapter Notes

1/5/21

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly scratched under Lasylin's muzzle and laughed when the giant red hart butted her hand when she started to pull it away. "You're a greedy little thing, you know."

Lasylin honked at her and butted her hand again. She sighed and pulled out the last lump of salt from her pocket, letting the hart have it. His liquid eyes blinked at her and then looked past her, going still with his mouth half open as someone approached from behind. She turned to see Cassandra watching them.

"That beast is a menace, I do not know how you can be so comfortable around him."

"You realize it could be worse, right? He could be a halla. They're as smart as Mabari." *And probably for the same reason*, she thought. *Thanks Ghilan'nain, I guess not everything you made was awful.* She leaned over the picket where Lasylin and the other mounts were tethered and patted his neck. He arched into the touch and she obligingly scratched along the places he could never reach. "I like harts better than horses. They have greater senses of self preservation."

"I suppose it sends a message too," the Seeker went on, standing a little distance away. Lasylin had been known to bite, after all. "The Inquisitor will not bow to human convention."

"There is that." Carly gave the hart a final pat and turned to her friend. "Were you looking for me?"

"Yes. We have received a raven from Val Royeaux. Our apartments in the palace are prepared. Divine Victoria will meet us at the cathedral when we arrive. If we are back on the road early enough, we will reach the city tomorrow by midday."

"Okay." The pair of them walked back towards their sprawling camp, Inquisition tents dotting the field, flags proudly displaying the Dalish banner Carly had incorporated into the official seal of the Inquisition. There was no escaping that she was elven, and she dared any to try. Especially now, with the danger past. She knew at least her former Spymaster turned Most Holy approved. "Does it ever get weird for you, knowing the Divine is Leliana?"

"In what way?"

"Bard, Spymaster...Divine. You've got to admit, it's a strange sort of resume."

Cass chuckled. "I suppose so. Does it function differently in your world, then?"

"For the most part. Religious leaders are chosen from their peers. There's ranks involved and age requirements. I dunno," she shrugged. "I guess I tend to forget that all those leaders that could have been chosen were at the Conclave, weren't they?" The Seeker made a sound of agreement. "I've never been a very religious person in general. I guess I see it differently. It just strikes me as weird, that's all. The leader of the Chantry is someone I've bled beside, someone who was deeply

involved in defeating the last Blight, a hardened warrior every bit as much as you.”

“Your acknowledged consort is a deity of your adopted people,” Cass reminded her dryly. Carly laughed.

“That's different. For one thing, he isn't a god the way you think of them. And for another...he's just a person to me. Just a man doing his best to fix the world he lives in.”

“That is what it comes down to, yes? They are all just people. *We* are just people.”

“Yeah, you're right. Maybe it's good that we have Varric to write about us, including our shortcomings and fallibility. History will remember this Inquisition as some lofty ideal that saved the world. But we are all just people doing the best we can.”

“It is good not to forget that, Inquisitor.”

They'd reached the camp, and Carly looked around for a second before she saw Solas sitting across from Bull at a low table, the chessboard between them. She smiled. “You're right. Tell the others I want to be on the road first thing.”

“Yes, Inquisitor.”

Carly wandered over to the chess match and saw Dorian leaning against the nearest tent pole, watching the game. His light eyes caught hers and he gave her a jaunty smile. She tucked herself under his arm and hugged him while they watched their respective lovers play. He reeked of ozone.

“When did you get here?” she whispered, so she didn't interrupt the game.

“An hour or so ago.”

“Is everything ready?”

“As well as it can be without the certain knowledge we'll need it.” She nodded; the best they could do was wait and see. She held out slim hope that she was wrong, that the victory celebration would go off without a horned hitch, but she wasn't about to hold her breath on it. Neither were those in the know.

“Did you two make up?” she asked, changing the subject slightly with a nod towards Solas.

“In a manner of speaking.”

Carly looked Solas over more carefully. He was wearing Keeper's robes while they traveled, although he'd taken off the sleeveless outer layer, leaving him in a billowing shirt and tightly laced vest. He looked...disheveled. His hair was wild around his head and not just because it was growing in. And when she looked back at Dorian, she noticed *his* hair was not as perfect as it usually was. Now she understood why he stank of so much ozone. “Did you actually fight each other?”

“You're as observant as Bull, it's irritating,” he growled, but there was no heat behind it. She stifled a giggle. “Yes, we sparred.”

“Did he lay you out flat on your ass?”

“If you must know, yes.”

Carly leaned up on her tiptoes and kissed Dorian's cheek. "Oh, I'm sorry. Did you at least get a good shot in? He looks...rumped."

"Andraste save me from ancient elven gods, but yes, I did. I still cannot get over this newfound head of hair, however. Did you know he was such a...firebrand?"

"Actually, yes, I did know. C'mon, D, it matches his eyebrows."

"Oh? Is that all it matches?"

"Did you just ask me if the drapes match the carpet? I'm *scandalized*." She put her hand over her heart and gave Dorian a faux shocked look. He chuckled and kissed her forehead.

"I've missed you, my dear."

"I've missed you too. It's good to have us all together, one last time."

"You say that as if we'll never see each other again. You don't actually expect this will be the last time we see each other, do you?"

"I don't know what the future holds anymore."

"That is both reassuring and terrifying, all things considered."

Carly looked out over the camp, seeing all the bustle and scurry of her forces, interspersed with the familiar faces of her companions. The only ones missing were Varric and Hawke, but they would be meeting up with them in Val Royeaux. "Once this is over, it'll be time to get back to the lives we had before this whole mess. Ya know, until the next big thing happens."

"Except you." Dorian's expression was shrewd. She nodded.

"This *is* my life now."

"You have made it a fine one, Carly. Even if it is one 'big thing' after another."

The chess match ended in a draw, and Bull whooped his success, knowing it was likely as close to beating Solas as he'd ever get. Without even stopping to draw breath, they started setting the pieces up again. She smiled, both at them and at Dorian. "Yeah, I have."

She rode into the city through the Sun Gate. Solas and Abelas rode behind her, flanking her as personal guards, the rest of the Inquisition behind them. There was no disguising their elven features, nor was there any attempt to do so. The trio matched, their Elvhen armor gleaming in the sun. She and Solas wore wolf wraps over their shoulders, while Abelas wore only the jacket, held closed with a small wolf shaped toggle. His bow was prominently displayed on his back, just as Solas's staff was slung across his. Carly wore no weapons, a visible sign that she needed none with the pair beside her. There was silent awe before there were cheers.

They rode through the streets of Val Royeaux with their heads held high until they reached the massive structure of the Grand Cathedral. Divine Victoria waited for them, a small smile on her face as she saw the obvious power play Carly was making at the head of her Inquisition. Carly grinned back at her.

"Inquisitor Lavellan, be welcome to Val Royeaux," Leliana said, her voice carrying over the throng

of gathered Chantry folk and spectators. “Let this mark the occasion of our victory, that all might take part in rejoicing in the Maker's will.”

“Thank you for receiving us, Divine Victoria,” Carly replied. “Let this be only the first such occasion to be marked with so much joy.”

Carly dismounted and climbed the steps of the cathedral to embrace the Divine. Leliana whispered in her ear, “Sometimes the pomp and circumstance has its uses, no? You've made a very impressive entrance.”

“Just don't expect me to do this every year,” she whispered back.

“Of course not, Inquisitor.” They stepped back from each other and let the deafening cheers roll over them before they entered the Grand Cathedral, officially beginning the festivities. It was controlled chaos for all of about twenty minutes as Carly, Solas and Abelas shed armor for uniforms – both elves changing into Keeper's robes instead of the Inquisition suits – and then they filed into the Chantry proper.

As the Inquisitor, Carly was given a front row seat with her two elves on either side of her. But being ostensibly Dalish, she wasn't expected to participate in Leliana's services until the very end. Still, it was interesting to watch as long as she ignored Abelas's forbidding scowl. Chantry services were sung, in keeping with it being the *Chant* of Light, and she let it sort of fill her with serenity and peace. It was very different from what she expected. Then Leliana began to speak of those they'd lost, the work the Inquisition had done and so forth. When the messenger sidled to the front and spoke quickly to Solas in a low voice, Carly barely paid attention.

However, when he then leaned across her to order Abelas to stay and be on his guard, she caught at him before he could leave. “Is it...?”

“I do not yet know. Stay here, please. It could be nothing, or it could be...starting.”

Solas slipped out of his seat, and after quietly tapping Bull to accompany him, the pair slipped out of the Chantry along the side of the pews. Leliana's voice never faltered, although she must have seen them leave. A ripple of murmurs followed in their wake, but settled quickly before a minute passed. Carly glanced at Abelas next to her and wrapped her fingers around his wrist. He flexed his arm under her grip, his gaze distant as if he was seeing something far away. Or perhaps that he was seeing everything around them all at once.

“I am here, Da'Fen,” he said softly. “No harm will come to you.”

“I know. I'm just...worried. I had so wanted to be wrong.”

Leliana was wrapping up her service. This was the only part Carly had to do. She knelt before the Divine and bowed her head as Leliana spread ash across her brow, symbolic of Andraste's martyrdom, while saying a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing. The irony wasn't lost on Carly that the ash was layered over her vallaslin. The Divine then whispered so softly Carly almost didn't hear her. “What is happening?”

“My guess?” Carly answered, just as quietly. “The Qunari are here.”

Are y'all excited? I'm excited. Welcome to the wild ride that is the end of this fic.

In other news, I have a question: should I add a ship tag for Carly being an OFC or is it really not that necessary? I mean, nearly a year later, it occurs to me that because she's not the canon Lavellan it might be a bit misleading, although it's clearly tagged as MGIT (and she's not a self-insert). Thoughts?

A Merry Chase

Chapter Notes

1/8/21

Carly and Dorian found Bull in a small side room off the main Chantry, unsurprisingly guarding the dead body of the Antaam that had tried to infiltrate Val Royeaux. The look on his face was sour, as if he too had hoped to be wrong and was heartily disappointed he was right.

“Where's Solas?” Dorian asked. Bull looked at her instead and she answered.

“He went through the Eluvian they opened.” She didn't bother making it a question. “Because of course he did.” Dorian sighed theatrically next to her but she ignored it in favor of keeping her eyes on Bull. “Did he want us to follow?”

“He didn't say.”

“Where is it?”

Bull led them out of the side room and down a corridor to the cellar stairs. Hidden behind a tapestry stood the mirror, still shimmering and open. If he hadn't expected her to follow, he would have closed it. They went back up into the Chantry proper in time to see Leliana approaching, her red and white robes swirling around her as she hurried.

“Inquisitor...”

“Looks like Dragon's Breath is a go, Leliana. You should get moving on those contacts, make sure the gaatlok is found in all the other cities. And the Eluvians.”

For a second, the Divine wore the same expression Bull had, but it was gone in a flash. They'd all hoped it wouldn't happen, but took no chances just the same. As Divine and her former Spymaster, Leliana had been one of the few she'd told besides Bull, Dorian and Varric. Their counter plans had been in the works since her time in Kirkwall. Now it was time to put them in motion.

Leliana gestured to an aide who came forward with a stout key which she laid in Carly's hand. “Your things are all in this room. I'll stall the others until you get back. But you will need to tell them when you return.”

“I know.” The group moved off to the store room Leliana indicated. Bull hefted his greatsword and flexed experimentally. He decided to take off his uniform so he didn't tear it. Dorian was quickly shedding his own and changing into his armor. Carly slung her bow over her shoulder with its quiver, hoping that she wouldn't need it. She'd been training, but her aim was still too reminiscent of her early days where she couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. Hopefully they wouldn't find anyone to fight anyhow, not with Solas having such a head start and no reason to hide the full range of his abilities. Still, it would be better to be prepared for anything.

“I'll put together a war room for when you get back.”

“I appreciate it, Your Perfection,” Carly said, teasing. Leliana cracked a smile and refused to let

the worried expression that wanted to cross her face escape.

“Be careful, Inquisitor. We are as prepared as we can be, but...”

Carly nodded. “I’ve learned that luck is thin on the ground. We’ll be back as soon as we can be.”

“Maker go with you.”

“Thank you. Gentlemen, shall we?”

Bull muttered about magic as he stepped out of the Eluvian and into the torch lit corridor of the elven ruins. *Vine Covered Tower*, she thought, mentally shaking her head at the name given this place in the game. Dorian just continued to look in awe of the entire process of going through mirrors to travel effortlessly halfway across the world.

“Are we even in Orlais anymore?” he asked.

“Nope.” Carly looked for signs of Solas and raced on ahead to the outside, knowing the next open mirror should be there. She was in time to see the bright flash across the valley. The sonic boom of the giant mind blast went off as she watched and she stood for a moment to just appreciate the sheer awesome power of her lover.

“Was that...?” Dorian asked, coming up the stairs to stand next to her.

“Yup.” She glanced at him and saw him go pale under his tan. “C’mon, D, you knew he was godlike.”

“But to see it like *that*. I can’t imagine how anyone could think to fight him.” He shuddered. “He went so easy on me, didn’t he?”

“Of course he did, he didn’t want to *actually* hurt you while you sparred,” she said with a smile. She pointed at the Qunari below, frozen into statues. “Oh look! More of his insane powers.”

“You are not surprised at this at all. Is he like this in your version?”

“He’s more powerful in real life. It still looked like that, though,” she added with a nod in the direction of the tower. “And in the game, we wouldn’t know it was him yet.”

“I’m just glad we’re on the same side,” Bull said. “We should keep moving.”

“Right.”

They went through the mirror waiting for them and came out on the other side where Solas stood at the bridge, his back to them as he looked across to the island where the surviving Qunari forces were scuttling like ants after his attack. He heard their approach and turned, not in any hurry. His eyes were lit up, however. He let them fade when he saw her and she went to his side, lacing their fingers together.

“You all right? Not hurt or tired or anything?”

“I am fine, vhenan. Did you expect otherwise?”

“That explosion was pretty spectacular in real life, ma fen.” He shook his head slightly with exasperation, but he was smiling. She knew what he was thinking; she was irrepressible. She

wouldn't deny it. "Been in the Deep Roads yet?"

"No. I wanted to see if I could get ahead of them."

"Best place to do that would be from the nexus at Vir Dirthara, right?"

He arched an eyebrow in her direction before he nodded. "You are rather familiar with my network for someone who has rarely been in it until today."

"I've done this before."

He smirked at her. "A version of it, at any rate. Your countermoves were meticulously laid, and have thus far gone accordingly. Well done. For now, we have some time. I have only come across foot soldiers and spies. The Viddasala is unaware her plan has failed and she has not yet deviated from it."

"Good. I need to get back to Val Royeaux. Leliana is putting together a war room for me. Time to bring everyone up to speed. Then we should get down into the lyrium mine and take care of it."

"I will take some Sentinels with me and set off the charges. I am more capable of preserving the structural integrity of the mine itself. We do not need a collapse on our hands. I will meet you back in the city when I am finished."

"All right." She leaned up invitingly and he smirked again before he kissed her. A flush of something cool washed through her, a feeling like something unlocked or shaken free rattling around in her head. "What was that?"

"The network key. You will need it."

"Have I told you lately that you are smooth as fuck?"

"I aim to please, vhenan." He brushed his thumb across her forehead, clearing away the remnants of the Chantry ash before he kissed her there. Then he turned to Bull and Dorian. "Stay close to her within the network. It is easy to get lost, especially for mortal races."

"Elves," Bull growled and Solas chuckled.

"Right," Carly said brightly. "Let's get this show on the road. Can this one take us back to the Crossroads?"

His eyes flashed in the direction of the portal and he smirked at her a final time. "It will now."

"Okay, and how do I navigate?"

"With thought. It will make sense when you reach it."

"Hmm, here's hoping. We have time, but not enough for me to be wandering around on a wild goose chase trying to get back."

"Such irreverence, Dalish," he teased.

"You know it. Okay, we'll meet back up later. Fen'Harel...ar lath ma." She slipped her hand inside the layers of his Keeper robes and held him close for a moment. She'd known that a lot of this was only going to work if they split up, and they had plenty of experience doing their own thing these days, but she hadn't expected it to feel so...worrisome. It was one thing to know this was coming and to make their contingency plans; it was quite another to have them in action. She felt oddly flat

footed, made worse by not being at his side while he did his part.

“I will see you back in Val Royeaux, ma vhenan. I will be fine.” He pressed a last kiss to her forehead and gave her a little push back towards Bull and Dorian. “Ar lath ma.”

The three of them emerged into the Crossroads and she stopped for a moment to see and feel what Solas had given her. Before, the landscape was merely strange, with its peculiar physics and endless clouds and identical mirrors. Now it was...clear. She could literally see the threads that attached the pathways to each other. They shimmered and hung in the air like crisscrossed spider silk if she stared at them too hard. He said to control it with thought, so she thought of Val Royeaux. A single thread grew brighter, the others falling into a background haze. She led the way, following the golden cord of thought.

“So...” Bull started.

“Yes?”

“He can change the magical elven glass.”

“Yes.”

“Without even touching it. Just like he evidently can kill an entire troop of Antaam without touching them.”

“Uh huh.” Their voices floated in the pocket space and she got distracted by it for a second before she remembered not to get sidetracked and lose their way. “You going somewhere with this, Bull?”

“Why does he even need the rest of us again?”

She stopped and looked at him. “He doesn’t,” she said with scoff. “But think of it this way. If he took care of the whole thing, one fell swoop, where would that leave Thedas?”

“Safe from the Qun.”

“For now. And unaware of the threat to boot. The whole point of his involvement in the game is to bring the invasion to our attention.”

“The Qunari spies in the Inquisition tripped over my spies in the Inquisition.” Except it had been by design in reality.

“I know you’ve had this knowledge the whole time, Boss, but...”

“You didn’t think she’d follow through?” Dorian asked. “Have you forgotten our darling Inquisitor has a fairly ruthless streak in her, amatus? That isn’t like you.” Bull glared at him but didn’t disagree. Dorian turned back to her. “Now I understand why you never ousted his agents, even knowing they were there.”

Carly kept her snort quiet and started walking again. The mirror that would take them back to the city glowed in the distance and she hurried to it before turning back to her two companions. “Not like I wanted to anyway, they’ve been useful. We need at least a bit of this to leak to the leaders of all the nations. Otherwise we’ll never get their asses in gear and be ready for the real invasion.”

Bull raised his eyebrows at her. “You really think there will be one?”

“You think there won't? Yes, this is a breach of the Llomeryn Accord. Yes, it's desperate and grasping, but that doesn't make it any less dangerous. This is a sanctioned move. We'll stop the Viddasala, but there will be another attempt right behind her. Tevinter is next on the list.”

“Ahh, the things I have to look forward to,” Dorian commented wryly.

“So there really is a schism,” Bull said suddenly. Carly nodded. She'd wondered if he needed to see the evidence with his own eye to believe her. It was one thing to accept that she had foreknowledge, another entirely to know that everything he knew about his former life had come crashing down around him. “The Arishok would not have approved this. He holds respect for Thedas, he fought here during the Blight.”

“Correct.”

“He's not the one who made this decision.”

“Probably not. I don't actually know.”

“That's going to be a problem.”

“Yes it is. But let's focus on this one first, okay?”

“Right. I'm with you, Boss.”

They went through the Eluvian.

A Short Con In a Long Game

Chapter Notes

1/12/21

Hawke was cleaning her nails with the tip of a short blade and Varric was pacing the confines of the small room when they emerged. Carly hugged him tightly, then hugged Hawke too for good measure.

“Good to see you two.”

“I hear the party started without us,” Hawke drawled.

“That's what you get for being so fashionably late.”

“Where do we stand?” Varric asked.

“The Crossroads are breached, but the bridge spanning to the sanctuary is still down. Solas is on his way to the Deep Roads to spare us the trip.” She grinned at the expression on Varric's face, more of relief at not having to go than any disappointment in the fact. “Now it's time to bring the rest of the team up to speed.”

“That ought to be a riot,” Varric grumbled under his breath. “Curly doesn't take well to these kinds of shocks.”

“Tell me about it.” Carly took her bow from her shoulder and handed it off to Bull. He and Dorian would stay here, at the Eluvian, to guard it. Carly, Varric and Hawke wound their way back through the Grand Cathedral to where one of Leliana's aides directed them to the chamber set aside for their use. She sent the other two off on their own portion of the plan – namely to work with Charter to keep all her agents informed and in business. Then she headed to the war room. Before she even got inside, she could hear Cullen ranting.

“One dead Qunari was bad enough, but now we have rumors of more? And they're hostile? And how does a *mirror* lead to somewhere else?”

Carly waited until the door was closed behind her before she went to hastily laid out table and looked it over. The Divine hadn't been idle, and already a rough map of the Crossroads was laid out, with several points of interest marked on it. Solas must have passed the information to her before all of this began. She decided she'd start with a quick explanation to Cullen.

“We've had one at Skyhold for months and you never questioned why it was there? The Eluvian network is the pathway the Elvhen used for travel. The mirrors are gateways, many of them to the Crossroads, a sort of pocket reality that stands between the waking world and the Fade. From within it, one can get almost anywhere in Thedas with just a short walk as long as there is a corresponding exit.”

“That's...”

“If your next words are not 'an expedient and efficient use of highly specified magic', I don't want

to hear them,” she said, deliberately light but pointed. “We don't have time to debate the merits of Elvhen magical advancements versus modern day paranoia.”

“Ahh...yes, Inquisitor.” He fell silent after that.

“This makes no sense,” Josephine said, a thread of anxiety in her voice. “The Qunari are not friendly to the Inquisition, but they have no reason to attack us.”

“It's less of an attack and more like damage control. At least from their perspective,” Carly said, sifting through what scant intel the others had gathered while she was chasing Solas through the network. “All Qunari think unbridled magic is dangerous and shouldn't exist without a leash. Gee, that sounds familiar.” She cast a quick glance up at Cullen, who flinched a bit. “Anyway, this invasion isn't just about subjugating Thedas, not directly. It's about their idea that they must contain the magic that nearly ripped the world apart.”

“But the Breach has been closed for two years!” Josephine sputtered. “Why are they doing this now?”

“Because now they have access to this,” Carly pointed to the map of the Crossroads. “Infiltration is slow work. Their plans for subduing any defense were going to be much bloodier and quick.”

“How do they have it?” Cassandra asked. She'd been quiet until now, working through the details on her own, Carly assumed.

“Trial and error. Say what you will about the Qun, but it lends itself very well to methodical execution of an experiment. A fact that I'm going to be counting on to stop them. Being several steps ahead and knowing where and how this is supposed to end works in our favor here as long as the Viddasala isn't tipped off that her plans have been thwarted. She's the leader of this little party.”

Cullen sighed. “First the Blight, then the mages and Templars, then Corypheus and now this. Can't we go ten years without the world falling to pieces?”

“We must ensure that the Qunari do not disrupt the celebration. We cannot handle a mass panic. Especially considering how many nations are represented here currently,” Josephine said. Carly smiled faintly, appreciating that Josephine would never change, even as she rued the fact that the bigger picture hadn't been grasped just yet.

“Let me handle the Qunari. There's more to this and I'll need all of you to get it done for me while I'm otherwise occupied. Solas is currently in the Deep Roads, cutting off their lyrium supply. They have overpowered Saarebas with them. Magic among native Qunari is pretty terrifying in its scope as it is. They don't need lyrium to be badass. The next step will be the arrival of gaatlok in barrels. We're keeping an eye out for it already, but Orlais isn't the only place being targeted. I've already talked to L...Divine Victoria, and scouts have been sent on ahead to the other cities where the network has Eluvians attached to it. Several Marcher city states and at least Denerim, if I recall correctly.”

“Maker's Breath,” Cullen swore. “What are they up to?”

“A single, Thedas wide onslaught, coordinated to leave us all in the lurch and leaderless. Chaos would abound and we'd be powerless to stop them from taking complete control. Like I said, it's less about converting us all on principle, and more about controlling us. The Breach scared them, badly. Qunari have no room for the kind of power the ancient elves had at their fingertips, and believe that no one should have it.”

"I can't say I exactly disagree," Cullen muttered. Carly arched a brow at him. She was done having this argument with everyone.

"Get over your Templar sensibilities, Commander. Magic is an intrinsic part of this world and attempting to oppress those who wield it has obviously worked just *brilliantly* for all of you," she allowed herself to sneer with her sarcasm for a moment before she got back to the point. He bristled at her tone, but didn't retort. "That oppression has ended, whether you like it or not.

"Now, I knew this was coming," she went on. "Or more precisely, I suspected it was. I put some plans of my own in motion a month ago. What I need from you three is to carry those out for me. Cullen, keep your men sharp and on the lookout for anyone who shouldn't be here, not all Qunari have horns. There will be viddathari agents around. Cassandra, work with Charter about gathering up the gaatlok safely so it can be disposed of. Bull is part of that plan, since he knows the most about the stuff. Josephine, I need your deft hand at keeping the nobles from panicking. I know that's throwing a lot at you. You deserve a raise."

Josephine smiled at the compliment and started making some notes into her ever present writing tablet. "I'll do my best to keep them calm, but it would help if I knew what I should be telling them exactly."

"That I have this under control. We aren't done saving the world yet. When this is over and they're all still alive to quibble about it, then we can decide what the future of the Inquisition will be."

"Yes, your Worship," Josephine said with another smile. Carly smiled back.

"My goal is to get ahead of the Viddasala. Solas will take back control of the Eluvian network and we can halt her invasion before it begins. I'm hoping to take her alive, so I can send her back to the Qun with a message that corruption has run deep in their philosophy. She's been turned from her purpose, which is to study, not plot out a mass assassination. I don't know who's calling the military shots right now in Par Vollen, but I highly doubt it's the Arishok. He should know better after his experiences here. But that's another matter. In the meantime, we need to keep this handled."

Before she could go on, the door to the war room opened and Leliana came through it, still in her robes of office, although she'd removed her headdress. "They found the gaatlok. Unfortunately, Arl Teagan was in the square."

"Dammit, I thought he was supposed to be kept out of the way."

Leliana made a helpless shrug. "I cannot control everything, Inquisitor, contrary to popular belief." They shared a quick grin between them. "He was impressed with your agents' quick action, truth be told."

"Well that's good, I'm glad we mended those particular diplomatic bridges. The gaatlok is secured?"

"Yes."

"What's the word from Charter?"

"Her agents found the defector." Leliana arched her eyebrows. "Evidently Fen'Harel decided to spare him."

Carly snorted. "He damn well better have. We had words about that. I take it the defector is being questioned?"

“Hold on,” Cullen interrupted. “What defector?”

Carly turned back to him. “A former Kirkwall Templar, who joined the Qun after everything there. He was roped into this mess because of his knowledge of lyrium. In my version of events, he would have been the one to tell us about the Viddasala's Dragon's Breath.”

“Dragon's Breath?”

“Yes, both the working title of this little plan of theirs, and a real dragon, currently being held captive somewhere in their base they call the Darvaarad. I'm sorry I can't give you more details than that. The network is vast and many of the places that branch out from it aren't marked on any map we have.”

“It is enough to get started on,” Cassandra said, quelling any arguments before they could start. She looked at Cullen and Josephine. “We have long trusted to the Inquisitor's knowledge, even before we knew its source. That has not changed.”

“You're right,” Cullen said. “We have work to do.”

The Divine cleared her throat to gain everyone's attention. “Before we do, there is the banquet. We must still put on a unified front before the celebrants. And you,” she turned to Carly, “must ready yourself for battle. I know you are out of practice since your...” She stopped and cleared her throat again discreetly. “I will secure a location for you to test your strengths.”

Carly flexed her ceramic fingers. Leliana was right, as usual. She nodded. “All right. Banquet, then target practice. I need to wait until Solas gets back anyway before we can move forward. It's his network, after all. He knows what he's doing in it.”

Carly mingled with the nobles and heads of state that had gathered for the banquet. Whatever small talk was being made she responded to automatically, without really paying attention to it. Abelas shadowed her, keeping himself well hidden from the crowd, but always within earshot if she needed him. Varric and Hawke stayed with her too, and the two women enjoyed watching the dwarf genteelly work his blend of charisma and acidity through the room.

The meal was excellent and the company was good, but Carly couldn't wait for it all to be over. There was still so much to do, but as always, it was a game of hurry up and wait. Dorian approached her after the formal dinner and drew her aside and she welcomed the distraction. “Bull is still with the Eluvian. We both agreed it was better to keep him out of sight at present.”

“Probably not a bad idea, really. The nobles are already getting keyed up because the Qunari are here. We don't have time to explain to each one that that horned man who looks so terrifying is actually on our side.”

“Droll,” Dorian offered. “How are you holding up?”

“Fine. Ready to get this show on the road and have it done. I'd like to have some peace and quiet before we get down to the real work.”

“So that's still the plan, is it? The calculations Solas has been working on are...excessively complex.”

“Oh, he finally let you see them? When did this happen? Where was I?”

“Fawning over your pet beast, as I recall.”

Carly snickered. "So you're telling me that while Solas was handing you your whole ass while sparring, he was also talking you through Veil manipulation?"

“What a charming phrase, although I am quite certain my ass had nothing to do with it.”

“C'mon, D, you have a great ass...for a shem.”

“I'm not quite sure how to take that,” Dorian intoned, but his eyes were twinkling with good humor. Carly snorted and bit her tongue. He saw and grinned at her for just a moment, then he grew serious again. “Just...know that I stand ready to help, Carly, when you get there.”

“Thanks, Dorian.” She leaned on him a little before seeing another contingent of Fereldan banns crossing the banquet hall to talk to her. “Right, duty calls.”

Normality In These Abnormal Times

Chapter Notes

1/15/21

Me @ me: When was the last time we saw Carly train? *looks back* Chapter *EIGHT?!*

In my defense, a lot has happened since then. Here, have some fluff on the eve of the big fight scene.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Leliana had found a narrow corridor for her to shoot in. It had few windows, and the wing was unused, so she wasn't going to have anyone suddenly stepping through a door and into her shots. A leather bound hay bale stood at one end and she was at the other, an unmarked bow held in her ceramic grip. It kept slipping out of place, making her shots go wide or fall short. She had to dial this in; at some point there would be fighting and she wasn't about to stand out of the way like some damsel in distress.

The clatter of another arrow hitting the stone floor covered the sound of the door opening behind her, but only a little. She turned her head to see who it was. Abelas stood guard outside, so she expected whoever it was to be a friendly. And she was right.

“Deep Roads done, ma fen?” she asked, lining up another shot and nearly ready to cry in frustration as the smooth wood of the bow slipped in her too rigid ceramic palm.

“For the moment. The mine itself is now inaccessible to the Qunari, at least.” He watched her pull back on the bow, her left arm visibly trembling to keep it in place. She loosed her arrow and it went into the curtains with a muffled thump.

“Goddammit. This is going to be a problem.”

“For which I believe I have a solution.” He turned back to the door and called Abelas inside. “She needs an aenda'lav.”

Abelas nodded quickly and departed again without even glancing at her. Carly raised an eyebrow at Solas. “A sticky hand?”

Solas snorted. “A rough enough translation. Your command of Elvish has improved. It is a padded attachment. It will not interfere with the movement of your fingers, but it will give you more friction on the wood to hold it steady.” It was his turn to raise an eyebrow at her. “Did you think we had no measures to keep those Elvhen with injury accommodated for?”

“It's not exactly a common topic of discussion,” she retorted. He made a sound of agreement.

“That is true. In any event, yes, we had various non-magical accommodations to compensate for injury or debilitation. The necessary concentration could be wearying to maintain an ephemeral limb while doing other things, even before the Veil. Among any type of warrior, it was simply not practical. In the heat of battle, one must often change something, be it weapon or fighting style.”

As he spoke, he took her ceramic hand in his, looking over the detailing in the finger joints, almost measuring them with his eyes. She let him twist and turn it about, seeing it from all angles. It wasn't the first time he'd examined it like this, but it never failed to inspire wonder in her at how easily he'd accepted her missing limb. He'd broken down about it exactly once – when he found out. From then on, he treated her no differently, and treated her arm no differently, other than to be mindful of how sensitive the stump was to touch. She might be inclined to think he was cold and unemotional about it, but it didn't feel that way to her. *She* had accepted it and moved on to working with it. He had done the same, with simplicity and respect.

“Abelas told me it wasn't that uncommon in times of war for soldiers to lose a limb, that magic could cure a lot of things, but not that.”

“He was, of course, correct.” He finished his intense perusal of her prosthetic and fitted her bow back into her hand. “Until he returns, allow me to help.”

“How?”

“Lift your arm into shooting position.” She did, and when the bow threatened to slip out of her hand again, he stood next to her, straightened it out and then she saw his eyes flash. The bow stayed in place, although she couldn't precisely feel what he'd done. She could feel some kind of magic, however.

“What did you do?”

“Bound two points of contact. As long as they are touching, the bow will not slip.”

She snorted. “Are you telling me you basically made the bow and my hand into a magnet?” When he looked puzzled, she clarified, “A lodestone.”

He cocked his head and thought it through. “In a loose interpretation, yes. It is not permanent, but it should suffice while you practice.”

“Thank you, ma fen,” she said with a grin, then turned back to the target.

She drew the bowstring back and let fly. The arrow sank perfectly into the hay bale, although not directly in the center. Still, it was the best shot she'd had since she started and she giggled with relief. It hadn't occurred to her how easily her issue could be fixed, so it hadn't occurred to her to bring it up. It also made sense why she couldn't use this sort of magic in the field...unless he was willing to apply the spell to every bow she owned, constantly. Most of the time she carried upwards of three of them, all enchanted to do different things. *Too impractical indeed*, she thought.

She turned back to Solas, seeing the faint smile on his lips at her shot. “Seriously, Solas. Thank you. For this and...for taking it so well.”

“Carly,” he said, a heavy look entering his eyes. “I am responsible for this. The least I can do is ensure you are not hampered by it in any way.”

His tone was grave. She knew it weighed on him that, on top of everything else, he'd failed to keep her whole. She cupped her free hand on his cheek. “Hey,” she said. “I said I would never hold it against you, and I don't. I'm glad there are ways to work around it, and I really should have thought to say something sooner. But now I have, and now I know why all of you venerable types have been so curious about my fancy new arm.”

“It is a marvel of engineering, vhenan. I do not know if you realize just how much of a cooperative effort it was to build.”

She arched a brow in his direction. "You think not? Dwarves and elves creating a perfectly functional arm together and nobody died in the process? Yeah, I know what it means."

He half smiled absently. "You are a wonder, vhenan. If anyone in this world can achieve lasting peace between the races, it will be you." He took a step back from her to give her room and gestured for her to keep shooting. "Tell me how the meeting with your advisors went."

How was your day, honey, she thought to herself and nearly laughed out loud. "It was...well, it was full of Cullen complaining, Josie trying desperately not to wring her hands, Cassandra ready to throw things and Leliana being Leliana." She waited patiently as Solas gathered up her arrows with a gesture and took one from him to nock again. "So, you know, it was normal."

"So while you're gallivanting about the Eluvian network, the rest of us will what? Stay here and look pretty?" Dorian scowled at her.

"Pretty much. I need you and Bull to work with Leliana to keep the peace. The last thing we need is panic among the heads of state," she replied, tugging on the straps of her Sentinel armor. Dorian made an impatient noise and brushed her hands aside to do the straps himself. She gave him a fondly exasperated look, which he echoed pointedly.

"Where is Solas?"

"Already in the network. I'm meeting up with him once I leave here."

"I don't like the thought of you going into unknown battle without me. It carries the ring of fateful death and dismemberment or some such nonsense."

"D, we haven't fought at each other's side in over a year."

"Only because there was nothing to fight. And we've been apart." He stepped back and looked her over with a critical eye. He made small adjustments to the way her jacket fell across her shoulders and back. There would be no wearing a wolf pelt for this, it would only get in her way. "Now that I think about it, that isn't any comfort, either."

"I know." She picked up the aenda'lav Abelas found for her and began to put it on the way he showed her. It looked rather like a shooting glove from Earth. It slipped over her fingers easily enough with a pad of rough leather resting at the base of them, where the fattier part of her palm should have been. It was secured in place with a strap around her wrist. She snorted. "Now I know how all those Sentinels could stand there motionless with their bows trained on us in the Temple of Mythal, even with all that armor."

"You will be careful, my dear, won't you?"

"Of course I will, Dorian. I need to stick around to mediate between you and Solas when you start arguing over maths."

He chuckled appreciatively. "How mundane, to reduce theoretical magic down to *mathematics*."

"The shoe fits. And it's not theoretical to him, remember that." She gave herself a full body jiggle to make sure everything was in place and comfortable. Then she spread her arms and let Dorian appraise her a final time. "How do I look?"

"Elven."

“Duh.” He smiled, a gentle one that nevertheless conveyed a deep running worry. She pulled him into a hug. “I’ll be fine, D. I’ll be in the company of incredibly well seasoned warriors and a literal god. I’ll be fine.”

“You had better be. As if Corypheus hadn’t been enough. I’ve seen enough war to last me a lifetime. I don’t want to see it take my dearest friend.”

“It won’t.” She gathered up her arrows, made sure her potions belt would still go over her armor and shouldered Telana’s bow. “All right, I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.”

They left the store room where all their gear was still being kept under the careful eye of the Divine’s personal guard and went down to where the Eluvian was being kept secure. Bull was still there, looking bored but alert.

“That’s a good look for you, Boss,” he said when she and Dorian arrived.

“Thanks, Bull.” She eyed the couple. “Once I’m through, Solas plans to shut this one down until we’re ready to come back through it. That’s as secure and ‘locked’ as he can make it. You two go and get some rest, would you? Enjoy that suite of rooms no one else is using. Just don’t...set anything on fire.”

“It was *one* time,” Dorian complained. “Why will you never let me live it down?”

“Because it’s one of the most hysterical bits of crossover between my world and this one. And because I love you.”

“Hmph.” Then he grinned, eyes twinkling as only Dorian could pull off. “Good luck, my dear. Do give my salutations to the Viddasala.”

“Of course.”

“Mind the Saarebas, Boss. They’re...”

“I know what they’re like, Bull. Honestly, you two. I’m not a recruit. I’ve done this part before.”

“It’s a little different now,” Dorian said. “It’s real.”

She sighed, knowing he was right. “Yes, it is. Just keep in mind I’ll be in the very best hands I can be in. With any luck, we’ll be back by teatime tomorrow and it will all be over.”

“I don’t trust to luck, Boss.”

“Go on, you’re harshing my theatrical departure.”

They stood together as she went up to the glowing mirror. From the corner of her eye she saw Bull’s huge hand swallow Dorian’s whole, holding it tight. She smiled at them and stepped through.

Chapter End Notes

aenda'lav - lit. fat/sticky hand, a word of my own making using FenxShiral's Project Elvhen.

(Seriously, did the game devs even *think* about how Elvhen archers, wearing full chainmail suits under that Sentinel armor in the Temple of Mythal, would hold a bow so steady? No? Well, I did.)

Ebasit Kata

Chapter Notes

1/19/21

Big action fight scene!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Solas, Abelas, Revanas and more Sentinels than she'd seen in one place since the Temple of Mythal awaited Carly on the other side of the Eluvian. They seemed to be conferring on a battle strategy, and not super well, if Solas's posture with his hands behind his back meant anything. She took a moment to center herself and walked into their midst, firmly aware that of all of them, she was both the youngest and the least powerful. Not to mention, the tiniest physically.

“Da'Fen,” Abelas greeted her politely.

Solas turned and met her tremulous smile with a warmer smirk of his own. She would freely admit that she was overwhelmed at the raw power of standing in the Crossroads with this many ancient Elvhen, all of them in identical armor, bearing identical weapons. All but Solas, of course, who was distinguished by his wolf fur and the fact that he carried no weapons at all.

“Were you able to unlock the Darvaarad Eluvian, Fen'Harel?” she asked formally, mindful that in this they were not consorts, even if everyone present knew that they were.

“With little difficulty,” he assured her.

“Then I suppose it's time to do this.” Solas glanced at Abelas and Revanas, who stepped a little way apart from them. It was only an illusion of privacy, and Carly was on her guard, assuming he had something he to say that she probably wasn't going to like. “You don't really want me a part of this.”

“On the contrary, you have earned your place here. I am concerned, however, that without magic of your own, you will be unable to effectively take part in this assault.”

“I've thought about that. There will be a fairly substantial force of Qunari there. But the main thing we need to do is release the dragon. Which will take stealth. I can do that part.”

He nodded. “So you can. I will likely not be able to stay at your side.”

“I know.”

“Ar shala ahn halani tuem,” Revanas said suddenly, proving that their conversation wasn't exactly private. She turned to the tall Sentinel, now quite serious in her armor and bow. A pair of deadly looking daggers hung from her waist.

“I accept,” Carly said.

Solas looked thoughtful for a moment before he made an acquiescent face. “Ma nuvenin. I will take the main force of Sentinels ahead of the second wave. You will follow them after. My intent is

to clear the way so you can do what is needful to release the dragon peacefully. You said there will be Saarebas, yes?"

"Yes. And they're massive. Bigger than Bull."

He smiled faintly. "And the Viddasala?"

"She should be there. Solas...I'm assuming every one of these Sentinels is aware of how much power you have?"

"Yes."

"Don't be afraid to use it, please. This fight gets ugly."

He gave her a long look. "So you have said. How exactly does this play out for you in your version?"

"In the end, you turn a bunch of attackers to stone. At once. Like, fifteen or so."

"In front of you...your character?"

"Nah, the Inquisitor finds the aftermath. A whole courtyard of statues that weren't there before. The only one the player gets to see in person is the Viddasala. She won't hesitate to stab you in the back. As much as I'd like to send her back to Par Vollen with her horns cut off, don't be afraid to dust her ass either if you need to."

He snorted at her impudence. Then he cupped her face in his hands. He didn't kiss her, and she hadn't expected that he would in front of everyone, but he gazed at her for a long moment. He whispered, "Ar lath ma."

"Ar lath ma, Fen'Harel."

Satisfied, he let her go and waved a hand at the gathered Sentinels, who broke into two groups. He led the first wave through the Eluvian. Abelas would lead the second. The mirror was blindingly bright as they all went through it but Carly managed to catch Abelas's arm before he began his approach.

"Hey, be careful. You owe me a chess match. I intend to collect."

"Ma nuvenin, lethallan," he said with a small smile. He bowed once, met Revanas's gaze for a second, then turned and followed Solas with his warriors. Carly and Revanas were suddenly the only two waiting in the Crossroads.

"Mya vyr ma," Carly said haltingly, parsing together her limited command of Elvish. Revanas nodded shortly. *Follow me closely*. She knew she should wait a little while before they entered the Darvaarad, so she paced in a circle and counted to a hundred. Then she counted again. Revanas watched her, releasing some of her disciplined sternness to grin. Carly grinned back and wished she could speak more with the Sentinel. The waiting was always the hardest part. Finally she gave a sharp nod, drew her bow from her shoulder and walked up to the still open mirror. "Here goes nothing."

It was quiet on the other side of the gateway, although there were signs of fighting everywhere. Revanas made a sound of dismay at the sight of so many broken Eluvians littering the hall. Carly sympathized. It had to be terrible to see such a waste of the transport that once connected all of the Thedas together. She put her hand on Revanas's arm in comfort, then took them to the double doors

that would lead to where the dragon was being held. Through the wood, she could hear the battle still going.

“Um...what was it? Ar'an dara banal'ras,” she said before she opened the doors. Revanas nodded and Carly dropped a stealth grenade so it cloaked them both. Then they went into the chamber, ducking in and out of the fighting all around them.

She could hear the Viddasala giving orders, and spared a quick glance around to see how the Sentinels were faring against so many Qunari. Trained as they were, they'd never faced a force like this, as far as she knew. They worked in tight formations, drawing the Antaam and Saarebas away from each other. Already the huge chamber held stone figures. But not many. Solas was conserving his mana. Carly and Revanas crossed the room and she took her guardian elf up a side set of stairs to turn the crank handle that would eventually release the dragon, who was screaming in the background and spitting goutts of acid at anyone who got too close.

The gears stuck and she shook her head at how closely this resembled the game, even now. There were crates in the way of the turntable. She got Revanas's attention and pointed it out, seeing the faint outline of her companion as she nodded. In silence they crept down the stairs again and wove through the fighting to clear their way. Carly knew they had to work fast. The alchemy that made stealth grenades work wasn't self sustaining and it would wear off. She hoped to get at least halfway through turning the gears before that happened.

They weren't that lucky.

“Shit,” she swore, dropping back into visibility.

A pair of Antaam turned and saw them, advancing with that menacing lope she knew so well from watching Bull. She drew on her bow and let fly an explosive round. Beside her, Revanas dropped barriers over them before throwing a Stone-fist at the attackers. It hit them, but didn't knock them off their feet. Carly kept shooting, trying to sidle sideways towards the next crank while she was at it. The two warriors split up, each taking on one of them. The one advancing on Carly began to run and she threw a handful of caltrops down, the movement still automatic. She waited, gauging the large Qunari's steps until he was close enough, then backflipped, releasing the arrow meant for this maneuver. She landed clumsily and hit her stealth again. She didn't bother to keep fighting; she needed to get the dragon out more than she needed another notch on her kill count.

Carly raced to the crank, turning it as fast as her arms let her. The turntable began to move again. More of the Qunari seemed to realize that the fight was merely a distraction from *her*, and filed into the gigantic holding cell. The dragon spit acid at them. Carly heard cries of pain. The gears caught again, just as expected and she cast a quick look over the battle, trying to plot the best way through. She had more gears to turn, and more warriors than she thought would be here were in her way.

Of course they are, she thought to herself. *We didn't whittle them down by chasing them through all those boards.*

Sentinels followed the Qunari fighters, keeping them engaged while she ducked and wove through the melee. She had no idea where Solas was until an Antaam with his battleaxe upraised over her head turned to stone. She didn't even stop, but kept running to the next gear. The dragon screamed.

“Hey, I'm workin' on it!” she shouted back.

Finally, she got to the final gear and turned it. The dragon was released and she bellowed a challenge to the world at large. Carly had been rejoined with Revanas and pointed to the gate, then

the crank for it opposite from her. The elf nodded briefly and raced around to the other side. They worked in concert, opening the gate that would allow the dragon her freedom. They ignored the fighting around them, trusting to the rest to keep the Qunari off them.

It was over pretty quick after that. The last few fights wound down and silence fell over the Darvaarad. Solas had managed to take the Viddasala alive and she was held tight between two Sentinels in a grip she couldn't break. Carly saw Abelas limping, his hood thrown back and a cut on his cheek weeping blood down his face. She looked around to see how many had fallen. Too many. But more than half their force remained upright, although many were injured. The Qunari were all defeated, though, and that was the aim.

Carly shook off the last effects of her stealth and joined Solas where he was keeping an eye on the Viddasala. The horned woman scowled at her. "Inquisitor, it did not have to be this way. After all you have done, I was shocked to learn you were allowed to go freely among your people still. Your recklessness nearly destroyed the world. We could have taken the way of peace, but you forced us to choose the way of blades."

"Excuse you, I'm the one who stopped the madness of the Breach. Don't think for one second that you Qunari could have done any better. We didn't force you to do anything, you *chose* to."

The Viddasala scowled some more before turning her gaze to Solas. "It was a pretty display of mythology, agent of Fen'Harel. But we are not fooled by legends. Whatever demon you command, it shall be put down like a rabid animal the same as you."

"Ya know," Carly said in a blatant aside to Solas, "it's almost a pity we didn't bring Bull. It would have been worth it just to hear him reject her orders." She faced the Viddasala again, her face grim. "Hissrad is no more. Now he is Tal-Vashoth. And you, for all your talk of glorious purpose to save the South from its own magic, you turned on your orders too and corrupted them to your own ends. You'll be lucky to escape with just re-education rather than gamek. Let it serve as a warning to the Triumvirate. Disorder and corruption lies deeply within the heart of the Qun."

She stepped closer to the imprisoned Viddasala. The woman had gone quiet and still, no longer fighting the grip of the Sentinels who held her. "Go back to Par Vollen and deliver my message. Ebasit kata."

"You may have won here, Inquisitor, but this war isn't over."

"It is for you." She went to Solas's side again. He looked all right, but he held himself in a careful way. He was probably injured and was hiding it well to anyone who hadn't spent three years fighting at his side. "We'll take her to Val Royeaux. Bull is probably the only one we can trust to deliver her back to Par Vollen in one piece."

"Ma nuvenin, Da'Fen," Solas said, deference clear in his voice. The Viddasala didn't let herself look dismayed, but Carly could see her slump. She gave a sharp nod and started the long walk back to the Eluvian. The Sentinels all fell in behind her.

And the only thing she could think about was the fact that Solas had called her by her elven name in front of all his soldiers. He had just named her his leader.

Elvish - as always courtesy of Project Elvhen

Ar shala ahn halani tuem – I will protect what I helped make

Ar'an dara banal'ras – We go to shadow

Ma nuvenin – As you say

Qunlat

Qamek – the mind altering substance that reduces its victims to drones

Ebasit kata – it is ended.

From Hand to Hand

Chapter Notes

1/22/21

It's the final ten! And we've also hit the 175K word mark. Woohoo!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They didn't go back to Val Royeaux immediately. They had too many wounded, including Solas, and Carly didn't even need to point out that she knew none of the Sentinels would be comfortable surrounded by a human city in such a state. They emerged out of the Crossroads at the empty Well of Sorrows.

Abelas took charge then, directing his people who needed medical care to the infirmary, while the able bodied took the Viddasala off to what served as a dungeon there. Meanwhile, Carly held Solas up for balance and looked around the transformed Temple. There were multitudes of elven faces about, but they were modern ones, even some Dalish among them, a few still wearing vallaslin. They stood tall and jumped in to help with the wounded, while others simply hunkered down and stayed out of the way.

“This is where all the elves have been disappearing to?”

“One location, yes,” Solas panted, for once letting her see how tired and in pain he was. She didn't waste time on more questions and followed Revanas to a private room filled with personal touches that screamed that it belonged to him. Carly got him out of his armor and saw the jagged wound across his torso. His old, faded scar was now an open gash and purple bruising fanned out from the edges like a drop of ink in water. She got him to lay back in bed, a monstrous affair of mismatched pillows and layers of blankets that would have made her laugh in other circumstances. She could barely appreciate it in view of the ugly injury, however.

“How did this get through your armor?”

“It didn't. Impact.”

Carly was horrified. “Oh my fucking god, Solas, are you telling me this is an impact split? How many ribs are shattered?”

A faint smile crossed his lips as he fell back onto his pillows. “A few.”

“Pride goeth. Immortal doesn't mean invulnerable. Although I'm starting to think it means idiotically reckless.” He closed his eyes and smiled gently at her concerned ranting. At least he wasn't bleeding all over himself, although it was evident that he had for a while. He was a mess.

“How were you even walking? You know what, don't answer that. You need a healer. This is more than you can tackle yourself in your condition.”

“Yes.”

It was a measure of how injured he must be that he didn't fight her, and that scared her. She made sure he was comfortable and went back into the main area of the Temple, looking for anyone who

might be able to help her. One of the less wounded Sentinels was directing elves to and fro and she approached him, not recognizing him by sight, but knowing that he was likely her best bet.

“Sol....Fen'harel needs a healer. Uh...ladarelan?”

He pointed towards the infirmary, his face grave but cordial. She nodded her thanks and entered into a scene of controlled chaos. Carly was no stranger to battle aftermath after years of running an army, but she would never say she was used to it. The wounded were laid out in tidy rows, with healers scrambling between them. It was quieter than she would expect, other than low groans and occasional hisses of pain, but it was still an active triage center. She saw Abelas among the throng and went to his side.

“Da'Fen? What do you need?”

“It's Solas. He's hurt pretty bad.”

“I will come,” he said in a voice that brooked no argument.

She wanted to ask if he was in any better shape, considering how he'd looked after the battle, but when he began heading towards Solas's private chamber, she saw he was no longer limping and the cut on his face had already been healed. She closed the door behind them and latched it, then watched as Abelas began to work on Solas before they even exchanged a word. Of course, she discovered why as soon as she got a good look at her lover. He was unconscious. It was both awful and awe inspiring to watch his ribcage knit back together, the lacerated skin close up, the bruises begin to fade. With a final pass, he whisked away the blood, then stopped for breath.

As he paused, Carly saw that he looked pale and shaken and she put an hand on his arm. “That's good enough. Don't kill yourself over healing him. You know he'd be pissed. I mean, angry.”

Abelas nodded wearily and straightened up from the bed side. “And you, Da'Fen?”

“I didn't get hurt at all. Well, I mean I landed on my ankle funny, but I'll be all right. Get some rest, Abelas. You need it.”

“You, as well. He will not likely wake for many hours.”

“All right. I have one more thing to do, but then I promise I'll rest with him.”

“Enast'or,” he said on a heavy sigh. She grinned at him and pushed him out the door, making sure it was latched again before she just stood at the foot of the bed and watched Solas breathe for a few minutes. When she was sure he wasn't going to either wake up suddenly or expire entirely, she dug out her crystal on its chain and tapped it.

“Carly!?” Dorian shouted when the connection was made.

“Hey, D. Stop yelling. I'm fine, we're all fine...more or less. It's over, you can tell Leliana.”

“I'm here,” she heard through the connection, faint and distant as if she was standing too far from Dorian. There were shuffling noises and then the Divine's voice was much clearer. “Tell us what happened.”

“We have the Viddasala in custody and the dragon is gone. I let her go, she probably won't bother anyone. She was pretty happy to get out of there. The Qunari forces were eliminated. For now we're getting some rest and healing up the wounded, then Solas and I will be back in Val Royeaux with our prisoner. I think sending her back to the Arishok with Bull and the Chargers is a thing that

should happen. She has a message for the Qun in the form of an object lesson.”

“Very good, Inquisitor. I shall inform the others.”

“Leliana...”

“Yes?”

“Is the sword of the Inquisition handy?”

“Why?”

“Because it's time for me to pass it on.”

There was silence at the other end of the connection for a long moment. Carly could picture all of their faces clearly in her mind. Dorian was probably frowning, Leliana was probably mulling. She would bet gold that if Bull was there, he was laughing and trying to hide it.

“You wish to step down from this role?” the Divine asked eventually.

“Yes. I did what I set out to do. And I'm no longer able to lead our armies, being one-handed. Thedas will still need the Inquisition for a while, but another leader should take over, make the transition to peacekeeping force. I think Cassandra would be a good choice. Traditionally, the Inquisitor would have been chosen from the ranks of the Seekers anyway. That's what Ameridan told me.”

“That is true. I will make the arrangements. And I will see you upon your return.”

“Thank you. D, you still there?”

“Of course I am,” he said, sounding testy and rather serious. “Carly...are you sure about this? You'll be giving up a terrible amount of political power.”

“Dorian, in his official capacity, Fen'Harel acknowledged me as his equal in front of his followers. I have no need for human armies now.” She sighed, the exhaustion setting in. “And it's time. We closed the Breach, we repulsed the Qunari invasion. I'm where I should be in the timeline to retire.”

“Well, I can't argue with that.” There was a pause and then, “Does this mean you'll be moving on to more...*veiled* projects?”

She snorted. “Yes, D. It does. I'm going to get some sleep now. We should be back in the city in a day or two. I'll let you know.”

“We will meet you at the Eluvian, then?”

“Sounds good.”

The crystal went dark and she got undressed. She tugged off the straps of her prosthetic and laid the ceramic down on a table near the bed. Her shoulder and arm ached fiercely from the dead weight of it. It had been a long time since she'd engaged in any battle, not to mention this was the first time she'd done it since losing her hand. She crawled next to Solas and flung the messy covers over them, making sure he was still well supported and comfortable. Then she curled into his side and went to sleep.

The ceremony to hand off the rank, privileges and responsibilities of Inquisitor from Carly to Cassandra was enormous. The Grand Cathedral was packed with various heads of state, Chantry officials and the collected members of the present Inquisition. Bull and Dorian were there, seeing this final act of their friend before they began their journey to the borders of Tevinter with the Chargers. The delivery of the Viddasala would take place on Seheron, under a flag of truce that Leliana had worked out with the Arishok in a shockingly quick spate of messages via raven. Carly was afraid to ask exactly what the Divine had said to her old companion formerly known as Sten, and therefore didn't. She was just happy to have it finished.

Now she stood next to Cassandra, both of them dressed in plain white robes, as Leliana presided over the transfer of power between them. Behind her, she knew Solas was watching, stiffly upright in his Keeper armor, his ribs still healing from the horrendous injury, but well enough for him to be there. He was flanked by Abelas and Revanas as an honor guard, as well as the pair of them being her friends too.

Leliana placed the sword in her hands and she felt the weight of it. She'd never used it once in the course of her duty. The only execution she'd ever done in the game was for Erimond, and that had been unnecessary in real life. He'd fallen into the Fade with them at Adamant, but they hadn't taken him back out again. His punishment was plenty.

The Divine said a prayer over her, then had her turn to Cassandra and offer the heavy blade. Their eyes met and they shared a smile. It encompassed everything they'd been through together in the last three years. Carly didn't think there was anyone more worthy of this role than the Seeker.

Cass took the sword and bowed her head to receive Leliana's blessing. Then she raised it high. The cathedral erupted into cheers.

They held a small, intimate reception afterwards. Plans were being made for a larger banquet, but that was days away. Carly teased Leliana for just wanting to throw a big party. The Divine didn't deny it.

"We are already gathered, and we should commemorate your many victories, as well as this successful passage of power. This is Orlais, Inquisitor. The Game is always playing."

"So long as the music plays, we dance."

"I'm not the Inquisitor anymore," she smirked. "I'm just Carly now."

Leliana raised an eyebrow at her, clearly disagreeing. "You are still Da'Fen of Clan Lavellan, Comtesse of Kirkwall, Consort of Fen'Harel, are you not?"

"I suppose so. Huh, that's a lot of titles still."

The Divine grinned. "And you will always be the Inquisitor, in name and memory. We would not be here without you."

"I suppose that's true too."

"We will not forget," Leliana said, a warm gleam in her eye. "Inquisitor."

Ladarelan – healer

Enast'or – 'good enough', from enaste – approval, and the suffix -or – having the characteristics of, roughly similar to English -ish

Courtesy of Fenxshiral's Project Elvhen, as always.

The Opening Moves

Chapter Notes

1/26/21

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The ballroom of the palace in Val Royeaux reminded her of the one in Halamshiral. Broad, several stories tall, decorated with all the gaudy trappings so prevalent in Orlesian fashion. The only difference here were the mirrors gilding every vertical surface and the fact that Fereldan furs interspersed the crowd just as much as masks. She mingled freely among the throng, moving easily in her comparatively understated Inquisition uniform. It was hopefully the last time she'd ever wear it. Cassandra was now the one being hounded for her opinion and services. Carly shared a commiserating smile with her friend across the room as she wandered from conversation to conversation.

At one point she stopped and had something to eat with Solas, who himself was keeping in the shadows with Hawke and Varric – an unlikely trio if she ever saw one. Solas seemed at ease with them both, and while Hawke didn't quite know what to do with herself, Varric made up for it. As she approached she could hear Solas chuckle at something the dwarf told him in an undertone. She noticed he wasn't holding his ribs as often. He must be feeling better.

“How does it feel to be the ex-Inquisitor?” Hawke asked her once she was close enough.

“Pretty good. I don't think the masses were quite prepared for it.”

“They never are,” she said ruefully. “I am still called Champion more than anything.”

“I'm sure you'll change it up on them at some point and be 'Viscountess'.” She and Hawke shared a grin over that; nothing had been publicly announced, of course, but Carly knew Varric had been seriously considering asking Hawke to be his wife. She already guessed she would say yes.

“One hopes,” Hawke said, confirming it.

Carly gave Solas a smile without interrupting his conversation with Varric before she wandered off again, snagging a glass of sweet wine from a servant's tray as she did. That part was the same too, all the servants were elves. The servant mumbled under her breath, just a whisper of Elvish. Carly nearly dropped the glass when she caught his name in the soft jumble.

He had agents here.

Somehow she wasn't surprised, especially after seeing his stronghold in the Arbor Wilds, and something in her relaxed minutely. She wondered how many there were in place. When she glanced over at him, he was smirking slightly, watching her. She shook her head at him. She sipped the wine and spotted the sunburst collar over the heads of the crowd. The Empress was making her rounds. Carly stood near the railing overlooking the ballroom floor and waited patiently.

“Lady Inquisitor,” Empress Celene greeted her as she made her stately way through the gathering.

Her mask sat carefully on her face, and her expression beneath it was calm and smooth, just another layer of political facade. But the Empress wasn't in as good a position as she thought. Carly was safe here, surrounded by the protection of her beloved god mage and his secret rebellion. Maybe it was time to put that into motion for real.

"Your Majesty," Carly bowed a little. "I believe that title more rightly belongs to Seeker Pentaghost now. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"We wanted to thank you personally for all you have done for Orlais, and indeed, for Thedas. We are grateful."

"Thank you, your Majesty."

"If there is anything we can do for you, please do let us know."

Carly smiled; it was the perfect opening. "As a matter of fact, there is something you can do for me. And I do hope it will not be overstepping, but as you know, I am an elf."

"Yes?"

"I believe some recompense is owed to the elves of Thedas after all we have accomplished on behalf of the world."

"What do you mean?"

"Nearly every single calamity begun by human hands has been resolved by elven ones, usually at great personal cost or death. Several Blights, the Breach, the attempt on your life and throne, and indeed, the source of the Blight itself. It is time, Empress Celene, to return to us what was stolen."

Celene's eyes went cold and hard, although the rest of her expression didn't change. She had to have known this was coming, but apparently hadn't expected Carly to baldly state it at a celebratory ball. Carly gave her a small smile and sipped the wine she carried. She made sure the Empress saw her ceramic hand around the glass very clearly, leaving no room to question what price Carly herself had paid in blood for the successful deliverance of the world. She waited. The Game was always in effect, and as much as she disliked it, she would play it as she needed to.

"I am not sure I follow," Celene said. Carly made a moue of disappointment and tutted. The Empress frowned. She was unaccustomed to being so publicly chided.

"I want the Dales back in elven hands, your Majesty. All of it, from Halamshiral to the Arbor Wilds. Orlais controls enough land. To keep reaching is greedy. You wouldn't want to end up like Tevinter, would you? Ultimately passe, shrunk to a fraction of its former glory through constant rebellion and war? One would think you would be rather tired of fighting. Be content with your glittering cities and return the Promise that your forebears broke."

"And if I do not?" There was steel in Celene, Carly would give her that. She smiled.

"Your throne is stable due to my actions. If you will not return the Dales, then I would be compelled to *take* it back by whatever means necessary."

A ripple of shock went through Celene, although she controlled it well. Certainly anyone outside of their sphere of conversation wouldn't have noticed. The Empress took several deep breaths, remembering where they were. "Inquisitor Lavellan, as you say, your title is now an honorary one. You command no armies, hold no political sway now that you have retired. This is not a demand you can make."

“Hmm, the political sway part is correct, although, now that you mention it...I *am* good friends with Divine Victoria. And I happen to know she supports my claim to the Dales as the rightful land of the elves, as I'm sure you're aware. I am also on remarkably friendly terms with the new leader of the Inquisition. As far as an army goes...what makes you think I have none, just because I am no longer the Inquisitor? Or do you not think an army of elves commanded by what amounts to a god would suffice?”

Celene gave up her pretense of civility and Carly could see anger spark in her eyes. “Be careful, Inquisitor. We allowed your rise to power because it was necessary. We allowed you to maneuver us into a position of your choosing because you held knowledge that should not have been made public. But you have used up that leverage, and we will not be threatened idly. We recognize no god but the Maker.”

Carly faced the Empress of Orlais squarely, meeting her eyes with a smirk on her lips. “Fen'Harel ma ghilana. Fen'Harel ma halani. There is nothing *idle* in my intentions, your Majesty. Nor do I think requesting the return of land promised to my race by Holy Andraste herself is 'demanding'. Humans have long prospered on the backs of the elves. You have long oppressed and disregarded them. Seen fit to keep them in squalor and poverty, to make them slaves no less truly than Tevinter. This is your only warning that that time is at an end. Be mindful yourself, and consider carefully your next move in the Game.”

She bowed again, a little lower, a little more obviously. “Enjoy the ball, Celene. I know there are several being held all over Thedas right now, to celebrate my numerous victories. I expect the one in Halamshiral to be the last held by human design.”

“That was a dangerous play,” Solas murmured as they crossed the palace to the suite of rooms they'd been given as guests of the Empress. She'd given him a quick recap of the conversation with Celene. He seemed both impressed and disturbed.

“I know. And I know Josie will have my head for it, but I wanted to get the ball rolling. Celene thinks she still has all the cards. She needed to know that I will get what's owed me, and the People.”

“Do you think she will give it back?”

“Nope. Not at all. I fully expect we'll have a war on our hands before long. Did I upset the timetable?”

“No, you did not. Accelerated perhaps, but there is nothing wrong in that. My forces are ready.” They reached their rooms and immediately Solas went on alert.

“What is it?”

“The wards were crossed.”

Solas was always careful, especially in human held places. The wards were attuned to the two of them, and no one else. Anyone who should not be in their rooms would trip them, even servants. These were minor, even though they'd taken him an hour to set up just across the door and window casings to their suite. Mostly in order to make them invisible. They wouldn't harm anyone, but they detected passage through them and he could read that as clearly as she could read a note left on a scrap of parchment.

Carly stepped out of his way. She had no weapons on her. But Solas didn't need any. He didn't even carry a staff for focus now. She let him precede her into their suite. Nothing seemed out of place, and no one came screaming at him from the shadows, but she didn't trust that any more than he did. He did a sweep of each room while she waited at the door. She didn't go inside until he waved a hand at her to say it was clear. She closed the door behind her and stood in the center of the room, still staying out of his way. *Someone* was here. He would find them.

A whisper of a footstep was the only warning she got. It was behind her – *idiot Carly, always check behind the door first*, she chastised herself – and it was approaching fast. “Solas!”

She ducked down and swung out her leg. The assailant tripped over her quick move. The figure was cloaked in stealth, and all she saw was a shadow. But that dissipated fast as the telltale sound of crackling surrounded her. She glanced up and saw a statue poised mid-turn, a knife extended. The face was frozen in a rictus of rage and determination. The assassin was human, dressed in dark clothes that Solas had managed to leave whole even as he froze the body solidly to stone. She saw why when she stood up.

He must have Fade-stepped across the room, and actually touched the would be assassin. He was still drawing his hand away from the neck as she got on her feet. He wasn't even out of breath. Meanwhile her heart raced, adrenaline still spiking. She'd expected some kind of retribution would follow her gauntlet toss to Celene, but she hadn't expected it to be so swift, or so aggressive.

“I always did look forward to seeing you take the eye thing to a new level,” she joked automatically. Solas raised an eyebrow at her tone, but he didn't chide. Snark was always her first defense, he knew that. She checked the assassin's pockets, since they were conveniently left untouched by his spell. From one she withdrew a handful of barbed caltrops. From another, a selection of vials.

“He was expecting a fight. A rather thorough one.”

“Good thing you are more so.” She wiggled the knife from the stony grasp and ran her ceramic fingers over it. They gleamed with a sheen of thin fluid. “Poisoned. Felandaris, I think.”

“An attempt to make it seem as if this was of elven origin?” he said, almost scoffing at the ridiculousness.

She showed him the blade, delicate but deadly. The hilt was wrapped with gold with small gems set into the cap. “No elf would be carrying this. And he's human, too. What do you think. A Crow?”

“Unlikely. Your negotiations with the assassin guilds in Antiva on behalf of Ambassador Montilyet has most likely made them consider more carefully before taking any contracts regarding you. Not to mention a Crow would not have been careless enough to be thwarted merely by you tripping him. Given the timing, I would say this was hastily planned.” He looked over the assassin again, rifling the inside pockets, searching for any clues. Of course, this wasn't the game, it wasn't like they'd find a written contract in his pocket with a convenient codex entry.

There was a knock on the door. Carly waited until she saw that Solas was prepared for anything before she opened it to see Charter's worried face.

“I came as quick as I heard, your Worship.” Her spymaster looked over her shoulder and saw the stone body. She froze in place for a second, then covered it over with a blink. “You already got'im.”

“Evidently. What did you hear?” She let the elf into the room. Solas, meanwhile, continued his search of their suite to determine no one else was hiding in the shadows.

“It was just a whisper in the kitchens. People who shouldn't be about, rumors of the Empress angry and Grand Duke Gaspard taking some sort of action.” Charter shrugged. “It wasn't much to go on, but I knew I needed to tell you. Guess I wasn't fast enough.”

“It's all right, Charter. We took our own precautions.” Carly unbuckled her uniform. The chainmail beneath it shone in the candlelight. “I need you to get a message to Divine Victoria. And find us another route out of the palace. Tonight.”

“Yes, your Worship.”

Chapter End Notes

Fen'Harel ma ghilana, Fen'Harel ma halani - The Dread Wolf guides me, the Dread Wolf aids me. Courtesy of canon Elvish.

Dun dun DUNNN! Intrigue in the final ten chapters? It's more likely than you think. My beta got so sucked into this she ended up having to review it twice to critique. I hope it had the same effect on all of you.

Well, Shit

Chapter Notes

1/29/21

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly locked the door to the suite as soon as her spymaster left and went about stripping off the rest of her uniform. Solas came back into the room bearing their packs. He didn't look pleased. "What's up?"

"I usually enjoy contingency planning as a form of entertainment, vhenan. I also prefer to *not* have to put those plans into action."

"Is that a fancy way of saying you tend to be paranoid?" She struggled with the laces on her breeches, her prosthetic starting to misfire in her anxiety. Solas's hands covered hers for a moment then he took over the untying for her.

"It is only paranoia should it fail to safeguard you."

She took a deep breath and tried to get her racing heart under control. She'd been in many fights over the years she'd spent in Thedas. It didn't change the fact that having an active attempt on her life during a time of relative peace was different. "I know. Just trying to keep the mood light."

She took off her chainmail and pulled her prowler armor on, knotting the sash just as the door banged again with the return of Charter. She let Solas answer this time. Her spymaster entered with a very angry Divine Victoria in tow, her robes of office gone in favor of a simple outfit more suited to a bard than anything else. Carly could read that as easily as Solas had read his wards. 'Orlesian bard' was just another name for assassin. Most Holy had given way to the Nightingale.

"They moved too quickly," she said without preamble. "I could not get ahead of them to warn you."

"I have a rather impressive bodyguard," Carly said lightly, gesturing at the statue. If the Divine was at all shocked to see a man turned to stone in the guest apartments of the Imperial palace, she showed no sign of it. Leliana turned to Solas and gave him a commending half bow.

"So you do. There is a route out through the servants' quarters being prepared. From there you can get to the alienage and then out of Val Royeaux." Solas nodded at her. "Be careful, trust no one until you meet with your own agents. There is a further whisper that Marquise Briala has a hand in this as well."

"How predictable."

Something in his tone made Carly look up at him as she shouldered her bow and quiver. "You think it was a test? I would assume she wasn't happy turning over the network to you."

"No she was not." He seemed to be thinking it through. "It is possible, I suppose. Leliana, excuse me, Divine Victoria, thank you for your swift action. I will take it from here."

“As you like. I will keep things quiet on this end. Contact no one in the Inquisition until you are safe.” The Divine swept out, and Charter stayed, keeping an eye on the corridor until they were ready.

“I feel like we haven't done this in years,” Carly quipped. Solas shot her a look with an arched brow and she grinned. He kissed her forehead.

“Irrepressible, Dalish.”

They crept down the corridor, even though it was empty, and went down the servants' stairs at the end of it, emerging into one of the kitchens. Both Leliana and Charter had done their jobs well and the room was empty. Carly let Solas lead through the warren of store rooms and back halls to a simple garden. She was still pulling her aenda'lav onto her ceramic hand, flexing and stretching the fingers to make sure they would obey her commands. She trusted Solas and his abilities without question, but that didn't mean she would be stupid enough to let herself become blind to peripheral danger because of it. When it came down to it, he hadn't looked behind the door either.

Full night had fallen and they could hear the remains of the banquet revelries pouring from the open windows of the palace. It sounded a bit like a riot was happening, but Carly knew it was just drunken Orlesians behaving normally. They hadn't seen anyone as they made their escape and Solas took the opportunity to Fade-step them both across the open space of the garden until they got to the walls. She shivered reflexively.

There was no change in the palace guard rotation, she noticed. Which either meant her survival had not yet been discovered or the Empress and Gaspard were more subtle than she thought. Carly didn't think that was likely, since one had a reputation for diplomatic ruthlessness and the other for being a headstrong fool. She and Solas followed the wall of the garden to a small gate that let out into an alleyway running behind the palace. It was empty and dark, facing into what during daylight hours was probably a market.

“Cross to the market, blend in with revelers on the other side?” she whispered to him as they crouched in the shadows.

He nodded, and dropped a barrier over them both. It would protect their backs, at least. The alienage was a long way from the palace in Val Royeaux, and they needed to be as cautious as they could be until they were safely away from Celene's grasp. They moved from shadow to shadow, Solas letting her take the lead as she had more experience with stealth than he did. They made it into the market fine and were able to skirt through the stalls without issue. On the other side, it fed into a broad avenue that bisected the city.

“All right, I'm officially out of my depth. The only part of Val Royeaux I know is the docks and the area immediately adjacent to it,” Carly said. “That's all the game had.”

“I know where we are, vhenan,” Solas replied and took her hand in his. He waited for a crowd to pass and they slipped into it seamlessly, just two more revelers on a night of celebration. They moved from group to group through the streets until she was hopelessly lost. But she noticed the surroundings were growing less affluent, the houses and businesses starting to look shabby. At the end of the street they currently were on, she saw tall wooden gates.

“The alienage?” Solas nodded to her question. They dropped back from the current crowd they mingled with and slipped into the shadows until the street was quiet again. The gates of the alienage were closed. “How will we get inside?”

“There should be a smaller door, offset to the side. Or we could scale the walls.”

“I'm really not in the mood to climb anything.”

She realized abruptly that they were not disguised in any way. She had unique vallaslin and was wearing Masterwork prowler armor. The only thing nondescript about her was Telana's bow, and even that was pushing the boundary of what a common merc would own. It was ironbark and enchanted with a fire rune. Solas at least was wearing his raggedly old wool and leather set she'd made for him ages ago. She hadn't even noticed until now, as he drew the hood over his head.

Beware the forms of Fen'Harel, for he comes in humble guises...

Evidently, he hadn't forgotten that part when it came to his contingency plans.

“Solas...how is this going to work?”

“Trust me,” he said and stepped boldly into the street near the gate. Now that they were closer, she could see the smaller door, and the grated window in it. She assumed a guard was posted behind it. Solas knocked on it, a rhythmic cadence. The grated window opened and a grizzled face peered out at them.

“Yeah?”

“Fen'Harel enansal,” Solas said softly.

“Hold a moment.” The guard closed the grate and there was silence. Carly stayed tucked into shadow as best she could, thankful that here there were no street lamps. The guard was gone a long time and she was getting antsy. Finally she heard the rattle and clank of keys. The door opened and Solas ushered her through it.

Inside the overwhelming sense of squalor was inescapable. It lingered like a miasma on the air, thick and cloying. A mix of old woodsmoke, burning fat and oil, stench from a nearby tannery and debris piled into corners and left to rot. It was too dark to see much, but she could make out the shape of the vhenadahl in the near distance, tall and broad, its branches mostly bare even with the season as early as it was. It was almost a surprise to see it there, considering it took up valuable space in the otherwise overcrowded slum.

The guard that let them in disappeared into a tiny hovel near the gate, leaving them standing alone on the packed dirt road that wound through the alienage. Stacked houses, cramped so close there was no space between them, filled each side. Some were lit, most were dark. The humans were having a festival; the elves of Val Royeaux were hiding from the worst of it. Carly felt anger burn in her gut. This was precisely why she wanted their land back.

Solas took her hand in his again and walked along the central street to the first alley that crossed it. He turned down it and stopped at a dilapidated two story shack that looked no different to her than any other. A figure was leaning against the wall, cloaked and hooded, one leg propped up against it. When they stopped in front of the door to the shack, the figure moved. Carly tapped Solas's arm to get his attention.

The figure sauntered towards them, there was no better word for it. They stopped a few paces away, still too well hidden in the dark for her to see any details other than the head lifting to look them over.

“How low the mighty fall,” a lyrical and oddly familiar voice spoke from within the hood. She realized almost immediately why it sounded that way. The figure sounded like Solas, like Abelas. An Elvhen, here?

Of course, dummy, he used his own password to gain entrance to the alienage. Of course he has agents here. She looked again at the figure. Solas had gone perfectly still at her side, so frozen to the spot she didn't even think he was breathing. The grip of his hand on hers grew tight to the point of pain. *I don't think this is one of his agents.*

The figure took a step closer and dropped back his hood. Pitch black hair tamed into a shaggy braid, shadowed skin that implied it was too tan to reflect what little starlight reached them. The lines of vallaslin branching out across his brow. The door of the shack opened and a golden glow from a lamp spilled into the alley. It hit the stranger's eyes and she saw *purple*. All at once, she knew who this was.

Impossible, her brain screamed at her.

“Holy shit,” she whispered aloud. “Felassan.”

Chapter End Notes

Aenda'lav - an Elvhen accessibility aid, lit. 'sticky hand'

sits back and waits for the screaming to start

The Slow Arrow

Chapter Notes

2/2/21

Solas didn't so much escort Carly into what she presumed was the safehouse for his agents as he *shoved* her inside, away from Felassan. Furthering her thought on that, he then stood between them, his posture defensive. The other Elvhen smirked from across the room, folding his arms casually and leaning against the wall with every appearance of then completely ignoring their presence.

He...smirked.

He isn't Tranquil, Carly thought. *What on earth...?*

"Inquisitor Lavellan," said a new voice, soft and rolling with an Orlesian accent. Carly turned and saw a woman lowering the hood of her own cloak.

"Marquise Briala."

Briala nodded regally, her mask glinting in the lamplight. "I am glad to see you safe. There was no time to warn you."

"I need someone to explain to me exactly what's going on here." Carly walked around Solas's stiff form and advanced on the Marquise. "It's been a very long day, and a longer night and I am fucking *tired* of the Game."

"Just so, I will be brief. You made a threat against Orlais. A good one, I might add, and overdue. Celene told Gaspard, who reacted predictably in his martial fashion." Briala's eyes left hers and focused on Solas. "I hear your escape from the attempt was...inventive."

"And how did you know we would come here?"

"Where else would an elf on the run go in Val Royeaux?" She was still looking at Solas, searching him even, as if she could find what she was looking for written on his face. Carly didn't need to look at him to know Briala would be disappointed. "He knew there was a safehouse here."

Okay, maybe not disappointed. Carly began to pace. She knew better than to just take Briala's word for it all. But...the Marquise's presence, combined with Felassan's...she knew. Briala knew that Solas was Fen'Harel. What's more, she *believed* it, unlike too many who were ready to dismiss the knowledge like so much ridiculous gossip. Historical beings out of myth and legend were only supported when they upheld the status quo. Like the Herald of Andraste.

And why would that be a surprise that she knows? If Felassan is no longer Tranquil, she must know what happened. Everything that happened. Which is more than I've got right now.

Carly looked at Solas then and saw what the Marquise was trying to find. The Wolf out in the open. Meanwhile, he hadn't taken his own eyes off his former agent. "Ugh, this whole night went straight to shitshow."

Felassan snorted from his corner but didn't comment further. Solas frowned. But he finally met her gaze. Whatever he saw there made his expression go neutral. Resting wolf face. But colder than she'd ever seen it. She returned his hard stare with one of her own. *Don't do it, Solas. Don't do something stupid.* He must have read it in her countenance. His eyebrow arched and he looked away. He tucked his hands behind his back and stood completely still.

Felassan snorted again. He finally spoke. "You haven't changed, Fen'Harel. Bring a strong willed woman into the room and you become *such* a faithful hound."

Carly turned to face him. The smirk seemed permanently affixed on his face. He looked much the way she expected, with strong, handsome features like every ancient elf she'd ever met. His eyes nearly glowed with the vibrant color in them. He carried no staff, but that wasn't a surprise. He was dressed plainly, another apostate hobo. But far less humble than Solas had ever pretended.

There was a table set in the middle of the room, ringed with chairs. She didn't wait for any invitation and pulled one out to sit, her back to Solas. She could feel his eyes on her. "Tell me, how come you aren't...?"

Felassan raised an eyebrow at her. A silent query to continue when she faltered.

"Tranquil."

"Imshael." There was a low growl behind her, so low it didn't carry far and she doubted either Briala or Felassan heard it. But it told her what she needed to know. Any spirit could restore a Tranquil's connection to the Fade. Even a demon. Even a Forbidden One. She nodded.

"And what did he want in exchange for that little favor?"

"It was in repayment, in fact. I'd spared his life, you see." Felassan pushed off the wall and leaned over her, examining her quickly but thoroughly. Solas growled again. It would have been amusing if not for the tension so thick she could taste it. Felassan heard it this time, and he grinned. "You're a clever one, aren't you? Would have to be, I suppose, to put up with him. I'm very pleased to meet you. I've heard quite a bit."

"I'm sure you have."

"You seem to know a good deal about me, as well. Which makes me curious." He stood up again and faced Solas. "You never even looked. I spent the better part of two years hiding from you in the Fade, only to find you never looked. Were you so certain of your success?" Solas didn't answer. "I do not blame you, my lord. I had earned it, for sure, and I hold no ill will."

"Do not call me that," Solas clipped out suddenly.

Felassan didn't seem in any way shocked at such a reaction and Carly mentally reviewed what she knew of their relationship. Which, granted, was a whole lot of supposition and hearsay. Felassan had been an agent in his rebellion, tasked with getting a keystone for the Eluvian network from Imshael. He let Briala keep it instead after a somewhat excessive amount of collateral damage to a Dalish clan. She and Solas had met the sole survivor of it, and she would bet he hadn't known it at the time, although she did.

There was a wealth of history between the two men, one that spanned millennia. It was always implied that they were close once. That Felassan looked up to Solas as a mentor and friend. And they had disagreed only once with certainty, ending with Felassan dream-slain at his mentor and friend's hand.

"We should have left by Eluvian," Solas muttered.

Carly twisted around in her seat to look at him. "It's in the Chantry. Do you honestly think we would have gotten there ahead of another assassin?"

He glared, although it wasn't truly aimed at her. "I dealt with the first, I would have dealt with another."

"Solas," she chided. He looked away again.

"Remember what the Divine said."

Trust no one until you are safe.

"I remember."

"Then you are on guard? You are not swayed by current company into a false sense of security?"

"We're right here, Fen'Harel," Felassan interjected. "As worthy as your notion of withholding trust is, you will need my help to get out of Val Royeaux."

The look of disdain Solas fixed his former agent with was breathtaking. "Hardly."

"Boys," Carly snapped. "Save your dick waving contest for another time, please. We need to focus."

Solas was glowering now, but Felassan laughed, ending on a slightly hysterical note before he reined it in. "Oh, I *like* her."

"As entertaining as this entire scene is," Briala said, "I must depart. My absence from the palace will be noted. Inquisitor," she continued, fixing Carly with a long look, "I am glad to find you safe. I look forward to our next meeting. May it be under much better circumstances."

"Marquise," Carly returned. Silence fell over the safehouse as Briala left it. A silence that grew more fraught with too many things left unsaid between former agent and leader. Carly finally gave them both a disgusted noise that would make Cassandra proud and drew their attention away from each other. "All right, I have a plan in mind. We'll need Inquisition scout uniforms and stage makeup."

"What are you thinking?" Solas asked.

"The Eluvian is probably being watched, right? But not for two scouts just going about their business. We sneak into the Chantry and disappear like smoke."

"And go where from here?" Felassan asked.

"That is not your concern," Solas said severely. "As you will not be accompanying us."

"You think not? I am hurt, Fen'Harel. Truly."

Solas raised an eyebrow and looked forbidding. Carly had just about had enough of the nonsense. "For fuck's sake, get over yourselves for a moment, would you?"

"Vhenan..."

"Tell me something, Solas. Why did you attempt to kill your agent currently standing here?"

“He failed in his objective.”

“That's not why,” she said. She crossed her arms and gave him a forbidding stare of her own. He couldn't dip into her thoughts anymore, but she was sure he knew how they rolled, just the same. She saw the exact moment he got where she was headed. “He thought they were *real*. And you weren't ready to hear it. Are they real, Solas?”

“They?” Felassan asked pointedly. She waved a hand at him. Time for all that later.

“Yes,” Solas said with a sigh. “They are real.”

“Then are you still planning to murder a man in his sleep? Again?”

“You have no respect, Dalish.”

She knew she'd won and hid a grin. He only ever called her that when he was exasperated rather than angry, and this was twice in one night. “I'm not Dalish,” she retorted, her usual response. “Now, can we get this plan going before someone thinks to raid the alienage? I'd rather not have a full scale battle on our hands without backup.”

“You aren't Dalish?” Felassan asked. He was leaning against the table now, having watched the interplay between her and Solas the whole time. He had a very calculating look on his face.

“No more than you,” she said in return. The calculating look grew, then he smiled. A genuine one, not a smirk. “Can you get me a message to my spymaster or not?”

“I can.”

“Then let's get on it. I want to be home. As soon as possible.”

“Ma nuvenin.” He ducked out of the safehouse, leaving the pair of them alone. Solas watched him go and finally relaxed his stance.

Carly shook her head and went to put her arms around him. “You all right?”

“I am fine.”

“You're full of shit is what you are. Seriously. I know this has to be a huge shock.”

“But not to you. Why is that?”

“Long story involving companion novels to the games, headcannons and spoilers from game writers.”

He sighed and tucked her close to him. “I do not trust him.”

“You don't trust anyone, ma fen.”

“I trust you.” He pressed a kiss into her hair. “I have good reason not to trust *him*.”

“I get it, I do. Aside from the fact that he betrayed you once, knowing Imshael is responsible for his return to his senses is...troubling.” She gnawed on her lip before she said it out loud. This was possibly going to set him off again. “I'd be willing to bet that wasn't any mere 'touching the mind'. Imshael possessed him.”

“It is likely.” He pushed her far enough away to make her look up at him. “Did you know?”

“I suspected as soon as he said it. I knew a dream-slain becomes Tranquil, not dead. And I knew he had dealings with Imshael to get the keystone and what that entailed. I would further be willing to bet neither of them knew what was going to happen when he inhabited Felassan's body. The only things I'm not totally clear on guessing is how long it took to get rid of him, or how long Felassan spent Tranquil.”

“And those are pertinent things to know.”

They didn't get a chance to delve further as Felassan returned, looking amused to see them wrapped around each other so tightly. “Charming. Inquisitor, your message is sent. It is unlikely to have an answer until morning. Until then, I suggest getting some rest.”

“Thank you, Felassan.” She pecked Solas on his jawline and let him go. “Do I dare leave you two alone for a few hours?”

“I will be on my very best behavior, Inquisitor,” Felassan said dramatically, hand over his heart. It reminded her of Dorian's theatrics. Solas just shook his head.

“I will not kill him tonight, vhenan. I make no promises for later.”

“I'll take it for now,” she sighed. “I'm exhausted and you two are just making it worse.”

Felassan showed her where she could sleep while Solas warded the door heavily. Nothing and no one would get in if he could help it. She was afraid she would be too keyed up to sleep, but after she started to hear the low murmur of their voices – placid and almost determinedly civil – she dropped right off.

A Foolish Riposte and a Welcome Discovery

Chapter Notes

2/5/21

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Carly woke to the sound of the shack door being slammed shut. It was full daylight according to the shafts of sunlight beaming dusty trails down from the hole in the roof. She stretched and her left arm cramped horribly, making her hiss. She hated sleeping in her prosthetic. Grumbling and now grumpy, she dressed and stumped down the ladder stairs to find Solas and Felassan seated across from each other at the table. Three plates of large fried parcels that looked like burritos lay between them. Felassan was sipping slowly at a steaming mug, while another apparently waited for her next to Solas.

“On dhea, Inquisitor,” Felassan said as soon as he saw her. Solas turned his head and smiled up at her. He looked much more like himself and not the Dread Wolf.

“On dhea, Felassan. Please, just call me Carly.”

“Indeed? Not Da'Fen?”

“Not for everyday use,” she replied, bending over to greet Solas, whose eyes were lighting up with welcome warmth. They bumped noses instead of kissing and she grinned at him. “Hello, ma fen.”

“Hello, vhenan.”

“Ugh, you two are nearly disgusting.”

“You two seem to have not killed each other overnight,” she retorted as she stood up and turned her shoulder to Solas. “A little help? I need a break from it.”

“Certainly, vhenan.” Solas put a little too much emphasis on the endearment. So that's how it was. Still a pissing contest.

Boys. Boys who are way too old for this.

The buckles of the prosthetic loosened, she slipped her arm from the casing and laid it down nonchalantly on the table before she sat next to Solas. He in turn put his hand on her back and she felt a wave of soothing magic pass through her shoulder and arm. She sighed with relief, cracked her neck and angled the mug in front of her so that she could grab the chipped handle with her good hand. Solas's hand on her neck dislodged the jawbone out of her collar to swing forward, and she saw Felassan jerk as he stared at it. The look he gave her when he met her eyes was calculating again, although in a more much thoughtful way. She smiled wryly at him and he saluted her with his mug.

Then she stared down at the large burrito thing. “What is this?”

“An alienage specialty,” Felassan offered, transferring his stare to her prosthetic on the table.

“Cabbage, onions and sausage of mysterious origin. Excuse me, I must ask...lyrium powered?”

“Yes.” She picked up the breakfast burrito – or maybe it was more like a large egg roll – and took a healthy bite from the corner. The two men seemed interested in her opinion of it. It wasn't bad, although it could use salt. She took another bite and got a bit of sausage. “Hmm, tastes like nug to me.”

She noticed most of Solas's still stayed on his plate, torn apart for the bits he would eat. Never a fan of savory in the morning to begin with, he was even less a fan of eating undisclosed parts of creatures he thought were cute. She bit her lip and didn't comment. Felassan's piercing violet eyes hadn't missed a second of the rapid assessment she'd done. She wondered how much of her he was cataloging with that quicksilver mind.

“A package arrived for you this morning, *Carly*.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, along with a letter.” Felassan handed her a folded note. She recognized the Inquisition cipher on it.

“Oh, good. Charter came through then.”

“The Divine did,” Solas corrected softly. She opened the note.

[Palace in uproar after disappearance. Rumor is murder by you. Evidence secured by Inq. SH assault planned. Inq forces staying in place. Seeker takes no part.]

“Well fuck,” she muttered once she was finished deciphering it. She met Solas's eyes. “They're trying to paint this as I murdered someone else and now they think they can assault Skyhold.”

“They want to wrest control of it from you,” Solas said.

“Yeah.” She refolded the note and took another bite of her breakfast. They needed to get out of Orlais as quickly as possible. “Cassandra is withholding Inquisition troops from it. I don't know if that's for solidarity or an attempt at neutrality.”

“It won't last,” Felassan said. “Orlesian politics will force her to make a decision.”

“You've never met the Seeker. I invite them to try and make her do anything she doesn't want to do.” She tapped her fingers on the table, thinking through the underlying message in Leliana's note. *Evidence secured*. That must mean she had custody of the assassin's stone body. Carly herself still had the knife. But most of all, she had Solas. No matter what Orlais tried to throw at her, he would beat it back. She was certain of it.

“You have your chess face on, vhenan.”

“Hmm, I probably do.”

“What are you thinking?”

“You said your forces are ready? How quickly could they get to Halamshiral?”

“A matter of moments, you know this.”

“And how long do you think it would take to blockade the city?” His lips quirked, not quite a grin, not quite a smirk. Felassan, on the other hand, burst into laughter.

“Oh, she *is* clever!”

“You want to hold Halamshiral hostage in exchange for Skyhold?”

“No, I propose to *take* Halamshiral and hold the *humans* there hostage. I will get the Dales back, come hell or high water. I warned Celene as much. I don't make idle threats. Never have.” She met Solas's dark, mirthful look with a grin. “We have the advantage of time. It will take weeks for the Orlesian army to muster and march across the land and then hike up the Frostbacks, while we can be home in hours. What do you think?”

“I think I am discovering new reasons for why I love you,” he replied baldly. To her surprise, she felt herself blush. He was rarely so open about the depth of their relationship in front of anyone else.

“You don't think it's too risky?”

Felassan guffawed. “Did you just ask that of Fen'Harel?”

“Okay, that's a fair point.” She reached for her mug and took a sip of the still faintly steaming liquid. It hit her with a rush of half forgotten memories and nostalgia. She felt the sting of bittersweet tears. She held the mug away from her mouth for a moment and just stared at it. She knew Solas knew how she liked it, but he wasn't the one who'd brought it. “Felassan...where did this come from?”

“The market, same as the food. The 'citizens' won't sell good tea to elves, so they make their own from a common little bush that no one else bothers with. Why?”

She held the mug out to Solas, who eyed it with the same expression he always aimed at brewed beverages. “Trust me, ma fen. Just taste it, please.”

Before Felassan could say what he obviously wanted to, Solas took the mug. The other elf's warning died on his lips as he watched his former leader take a sip of tea. Predictably, Solas made a face, but he swallowed it. He handed her back the mug.

“That, my love, is tea. *My* tea.”

“It is still an insult to sugar and good cream.”

Carly ignored him in favor of turning to Felassan, who appeared utterly dumbfounded to see Fen'Harel not only accept a mug of tea from her hand, but then willingly drink it. “Where can I get some? I mean the leaves, to take home.”

“The market,” he replied weakly, still apparently disbelieving in what he'd just witnessed.

“How...why...?”

“It's a long story. I promise I will tell it to you if you get me the biggest sack of tea leaves you can carry before we leave for the Eluvian. I have gold on me.”

Val Royeaux was in obvious turmoil.

The streets were no busier than usual, but the undercurrent of gossip was all in regards to herself being a murderer and how the Grand Duke's army was preparing to march out to take back Skyhold for Orlais and thus end her supremacy. She was very glad she'd thought to disguise herself and Solas, although the dirty looks they got, both as elves and as Inquisition scouts, worried her. Cass's decision to stay neutral didn't sit well with Orlesians, it seemed. She wouldn't be a bit

surprised if violence erupted soon against the city elves in mindless retaliation.

They managed to cross the city and reach the Grand Cathedral without trouble, Felassan following them at a more leisurely pace to make sure no one else was tailing them. The Chantry itself was relatively quiet. Carly could hear the Chant being sung in low voices and bypassed the main area for the narrow hallways that ran alongside the cathedral to the living quarters of the Divine and her flock of Mothers and Sisters. There were more Inquisition members around too, and they blended in well.

Solas left her side only long enough to make sure Felassan would get through the labyrinth of passages, and then they met at the stairs to the cellar where the Eluvian was stored. They were just about to head down when the door opened and Divine Victoria stood there.

“I knew you would be back. You received my note?”

“I did. Are you going to stop us from leaving?”

“No. I saw with my own eyes what happened last night. I will only urge you to haste.” She shifted her gaze to Solas. “I will move the Eluvian once you have gone through it. Do you have a preference for where?”

“A more private space would be suitable. I am certain you maintain safehouses for your spies. One of those would do well, out of sight, but accessible should we need it again.”

“As you will.” Leliana turned back to Carly. “This is moving very quickly, Inq...Comtesse Lavellan. My ravens are still yours. As is the Inquisition, should you require it. Maker watch over you.”

“And you. Leliana, I have a message for you to give Empress Celene. Tell her this was a foolish move on her part. We could have done this peacefully, but she's forced my hand. I will not offer it in peace again.”

“I understand.”

They hugged for a moment, then Leliana pulled away and began to walk back up the corridor towards the Chantry. The trio of elves wasted no more time and went down to the Eluvian. Solas activated it and gestured for Felassan to go first, holding it open for him since he did not have a keystone of his own. Carly didn't think he would any time soon, no matter how much they seemed to have made up since last night. She went next and stood in the Crossroads and waited as Solas stepped through. With a casual wave of his hand, the mirror went dark and blank.

“The others?”

“Should have already returned to Vir'Abelasan. Those were my standing orders if they did not hear from me within a certain time frame.”

“Well, aren't you clever?”

He gave her a half smile. “I do have my moments, vhenan.”

“Home?”

“Home.”

Chapter End Notes

On dheia - good morning

My beta hates tea too. She makes the same face Solas does. That's fine, more for me. But she's responsible for his reaction in this chapter.

I know I don't state it explicitly in the chapter, but the stage makeup was to cover her vallaslin. This entire section was once going to be completely different and included a scene of Solas dressed as the Orlesian Bard and Carly dressed as an elven courtesan. Obviously that didn't happen here, but if you want to read the original version, it will be posted in CRF as part of the deleted scenes chapters (I'll update this with the link once it's posted).

The Worth of Common Ground

Chapter Notes

2/9/21

We are in the final five...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The trip from Val Royeaux to Skyhold through the network involved a stop at the Vir Dirthara, as Carly figured it would. They were traversing the breadth of Orlais after all, and the Crossroads, while extensive, weren't what they used to be. Felassan was quiet for the first part, content to follow them as they wandered through the maze of broken and dark Eluvians to those few that lit up at Solas's approach. If he noted that they didn't speak much, or do more than simply lace their hands together, he made no comment on it.

Carly watched his face as they emerged into the shattered library. There was grief, but also a kind of acceptance. He must have known ahead of time what the Veil did to their world. He caught her watching and offered her a small smile.

"Tell me," he asked as they wandered through the remains of the library, "how did you two meet?"

"I fell out of the Breach."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that. Actually, now that we're talking about it...Solas, did I?"

Solas stopped and thought back to those early days she didn't know. She had no real idea of whether or not she'd actually fallen from the Breach or hadn't been transported until she woke up. Her first memory was of being in the cell under the Chantry, manacled and threatened by Cass.

"To my certain knowledge. I cared for you for many days, stabilizing the Anchor."

"And it was me? This me? Huh. I have no memory of anything until the day I woke up. Like, I was in one place, then here."

"I am getting the delightful feeling that I'm missing some essential portion of these events," Felassan said lightly. Carly saw a crease form on Solas's lips, a small telling smile. He was going to leave it to her whether or not she wanted to share this bit of information on herself.

"I'm not from Thedas."

"I gathered that," Felassan said dryly. "Where are you from?"

"Another dimension. I'm not an elf...well, I am *now*, I suppose. In my old world, I was human."

"Indeed?" His eyebrows shot up, although he didn't seem overly shocked by the news. "How did you get here?"

Carly glanced at Solas before she answered. She still wasn't positive, and she didn't know if reminders would be painful for him, but it was her best guess. "Mythal, I think."

"Ah, praise the All-Mother, so meddlesome when it suits her." Solas stiffened and moved on. Felassan narrowed his eyes and turned his thoughtful gaze on Carly when she just stayed where she was and let Solas have his space. "What am I missing now?"

"He didn't tell you what he'd done?"

"No. What did our dear Rebel Wolf do?"

She knew Solas didn't fully trust Felassan. She knew she shouldn't trust him either, no matter how affable and genuine he seemed. She was well aware that it was a risk to bring the former agent and current spy for Briala to Skyhold. She chose her words carefully. "He did what he set out to."

Felassan's breath caught and he grabbed her arm in a strong grip. "Then the Evanuris are...gone?"

"Yes."

"Then we are *free*," Felassan breathed. His whole body seemed to loosen and relax. His face changed, the sardonic expression he wore all the time slipping away to something raw but happy. It occurred to her that while Solas used politeness as a mask, Felassan used snark. Like she did. He let her go, and with more spring in his step he took off to follow Solas. She brought up the rear of their little party now, and got to see the differences in their body language as they moved through the Vir Dirthara to the mirror that led to Skyhold. Well, for now. She didn't know if Solas planned to change that.

He was waiting for her next to the Eluvian, his face set in a serious expression. Like he'd made a decision and didn't like it. Or that she wasn't going to like. "What is it?"

"I am not coming with you. I will go to Vir'Abelasan and prepare my forces to move on Halamshiral." He looked up at Felassan and something unreadable went through his eyes. "He will not be too much of a nuisance, I imagine. Make Skyhold ready. Close the gates, let no one in or out. There are agents in place."

"Misyl."

"Among others," he agreed with a nod. "I will contact you when I am able. The Eluvian will unlock for you, should you need it to."

"And where will it lead?"

"Here. I will lock the other paths from this location. If you need refuge before I return, you will be safe here."

"How long do you think it will take?"

"I don't know." He cupped her face in his hands and she melted into his touch. It had been too infrequent lately. He smiled, guessing what she was thinking. And then he leaned down and kissed her softly. She clung to him and deepened the kiss, biting his lower lip so he gasped a little. She wasn't above making a show in front of someone else. Solas nipped her back, a warning that he knew what she was up to. They were both smirking at the other when he drew away. "So shameless. I will see you upon my return."

"Ar lath ma."

He pressed a kiss to her forehead and whispered into her skin. “Ar lath ma, vhenan.”

The Eluvian remained open after she went through it. She sat in one of the sheet shrouded chairs while she waited. No doubt the former agent was getting a laundry list of rules for being trusted with her alone, and threats of retribution if anything happened. She snorted to herself. Felassan finally came through the glass and then it darkened, leaving the room gloomy.

“Welcome to Skyhold.”

He arched an eyebrow at her, then grinned. “Give me a tour?”

“Like you need one.”

“This is no longer a gathering place of Elvhen, nor the hidden stronghold of a rebellion. Not that it ever truly was, more a destination by goal, if you take my meaning. Show me what the humans have done with it.”

“All right.”

“It's so...static,” he said, after they'd wandered through all the levels and ended up on the ramparts overlooking the mountains. The first thing she'd done was order the portcullis down and the drawbridge raised. After that, it had been a pleasant walk through the various places in the fortress from rotunda to walls.

“The waking world is very static,” she replied. He gave an approving hum of a noise.

“Not many see that.”

“Solas likes to say I have an appreciation for the Fade that he's never encountered before. I take it at face value, with no presumptions. Apparently I have a way with spirits.” He snorted. The irony of her statement wasn't lost on her either.

“You always call him 'Solas'?”

“Pretty much. For one thing, most of his time with the Inquisition he was hiding the Wolf part. He's only ever been 'Fen'Harel' in private if I need his immediate attention or I'm about to rip him a new asshole. 'Fen'Ghilen' is nearly forgotten entirely.”

Felassan chortled. “You truly *do* know everything about him. He's finally met his match. I never dreamed to see the day. You have quite a colorful outlook on life and how you express yourself.”

“I know. Comes from being an otherworlder. That was hard to hide too.”

“You did not always express it so readily?”

“Only with him. Well, and a few others who knew. I didn't tell everyone until we were ready to take down Corypheus. And even now, it's not common knowledge. Just among the highest ranks of the Inquisition.”

“Wise.”

“Yeah. People thought I was the Herald of Andraste. I *really* didn't need that to end in a similar fashion to her own life.”

“Mythal's mercy, no.” He reached for the jawbone and cradled it in his hand before letting it drop back onto her chest. “Do you know what this is?”

“The protection, the concealment or its origin?” she asked dryly.

He smirked, as he was wont to do. “I see you know at least two of its parts.”

“I don't know its origin. I've never asked.”

“I gave it to him. Before the Veil. Before the rebellion, actually. A symbol for the Rebel Wolf. He still wore it when he...when I saw him last.” *In the Fade*, she knew he meant. “And now you do.”

“It began as a promise. In my...in the version of all this that exists in my world, he would have left me. He let me wear it so I'd know he wasn't going to. When he assaulted the Fade, he gave it to me to hold onto, another promise that he'd come back. When he did, he told me I should keep it. I'm assuming because he doesn't need it anymore.”

“And you are now the symbol of his rebellion, I think.”

“Oh?”

“Oh, yes.”

“So tell me about you, Slow Arrow. Why'd you do it? Why did you give the keystone to Briala and not him?”

He smirked again, then shrugged. “They are people, no?”

“Of course.”

“I followed Fen'Harel for many centuries. Among his closest kith and kin, perhaps I was with him the longest. I believed in every step of his rebellion, in every attempt to free the People from the clutches of the Evanuris. I helped him create the plan for the Veil, although my own magic does not compare in strength. I was *born*, you see.”

There were layers there regarding the difference between elgar'venathe and elves that were birthed by more normal means. She decided to examine that later. “Did he free you?”

He gave her a sardonic look. “I still wear the blood writing.”

“And...? So do I.”

“Yes, you do. Rather blatantly, I might add.”

“Mythal's doing, I assume. I drew this in my own world, had it made for my version. She made them real when she put me here.”

“I served the All-Mother faithfully. After her murder, I kept her marks in memory.”

“Like Abelas.”

“Who?”

I shed my name the day I began her service. I shed my new one again, now that she rests. I will only be known by the sorrow that cuts my heart.

“A Sentinel. I don't know what he was called before, but now he's Abelas. He's the leader of Solas's forces in Vir'Abelasan.”

“Ahh, I think you mean Dhrua'salin. The serious, golden eyed boy.”

The Faithful One.

“That certainly sounds about right.” They went back down into one of the courtyards. There weren't many people around, and most of them elves. Everyone in the Inquisition had left to go to Val Royeaux for the celebration. Which of course meant that now there was no one to defend Skyhold if it came under siege. But she'd deal with that when or if it happened. “You didn't answer my question, by the way. Why did you betray him?”

“I have lived among these shadows, as he called them once, for many years. I've seen their struggles and their triumphs. They didn't need to prove their worth to me, but they deserved a chance to prove it to him. He held their fate in his hands. I should have known he would be stubborn about it.”

“That simple?”

“Indeed. I accepted the risk. Death at his hands would be swift. He has always tried to be merciful. Neither of us knew what the Veil had done.”

“Tranquility. I remember, when he first found out about it as a thing, how horrified he was.”

“You weren't surprised to meet me, other than the shock of it being a reality. Why is that?”

“In my world, all of this is a work of fiction. You are part of that narrative. I knew you were his agent, I knew he thought he'd killed you. And I knew that in order to change his path, he would need to see the lives here as real and make a decision that their value was worth more than an ideal of the past that never really existed.”

“You knew what he planned to do. How did you stop him?”

“I convinced him to do it another way. He's still working on the details, but it shouldn't be long now until he's ready.”

“Will he still remove the Veil?”

“Sorta. It's...long and complicated and has more math in it than I can explain.”

“*That* I can believe wholeheartedly.” They went inside and Felassan walked back to the rotunda, looking over the murals again. “He's still an artist. I'm glad to see it.”

“Me too.”

He fixed her with a piercing look, although it was warm. “You are quite a marvel, Da'Fen Carly Lavellan. Let no one tell you that you are not his equal.”

“Well, I'm not a mage.”

He waved a dismissive hand. “If he has his way, that will change.”

“You really think so?”

“I do. It's the birthright of all elves, even those flung across dimensions.” He grinned at her, his

violet eyes flashing. “I can't wait to see what you do with it.”

Chapter End Notes

Elgar'venathe - 'spirits who walk', a term borrowed from queenofkadara for spirit born Elvhen

There was supposed to be plot here, but Felassan just wanted to chat. Sorry, not sorry, I bow to the whims of my characters. I'm fairly certain no one minds.

Also, did I make up a previous name for Abelas? Yup. Did I also imply he's younger than both Solas and Felassan? Yup. Call it the merest dusting of headcannon glitter.

Rooks, Mages and Queens

Chapter Notes

2/12/21

Okay, NOW on to plot...

Quick note: this chapter relies on the reader's knowledge of Solas and Bull's mental chess game. Both because I love it for its clever use of symbolism to accurately describe their two characters and because *I* like chess and will use it as a layer of symbolism too.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There was a raven in the previously empty rookery. Carly had been checking every day, waiting for word to come from the Divine. Or from Charter. Whoever had control of the birds these days.

A week had gone by, with no news. Skyhold was barricaded, but with no soldiers. Solas had met her in the Fade, but wouldn't tell her what he was up to, other than to say plans were in motion. Felassan trained in the empty courtyard, flinging empty spells at haybales and wooden posts and had nothing more to share than what she already knew. He moved a lot like Solas through the steps, graceful, agile and understated. She couldn't believe she'd never noticed before that Bull was absolutely right. Elvhen had less flourish, more economy of movement. And yet, they were far more terrifying for it.

She took the message from the raven's leg and fed it a scrap of meat Leliana, and then Charter, had always kept in a chilled box up there. It eyed her askance, took the offered meat, and retreated to one of the perches to gobble it down. She opened the note. The handwriting was Leliana's.

[Val R forces left today. Muster in every town. Gaspard brings an army to SH. Alienage empty overnight. No sign of violence. Had reports of same across Orlais. It is chaos. Maker hold you in his hands.]

Bull and Solas's voices spoke in her head, a memory of chess matches played entirely in their minds. "Arishok takes tower. Check. What are you doing, Solas?"

"King to E2."

"All right, Tamassaran takes tower. Your last tower, by the way."

"Pawn to E5."

"Really? I've got my whole army bearing down on your king and you're moving a pawn?"

"Pawn to E5," she murmured aloud. Pawns, those simple pieces that held so little power on their own, so expendable. So vital for everything else to function.

Solas was moving the pawns out of Orlais, drawing them off the board. She didn't think this was just for their safety. Oh no. Any pawn that crossed the board could be made into any other piece. A bishop, a knight, a rook.

But more than that, the elves disappearing from Orlais left total disarray in their wake. Without the multitudes of servants, merchants and laborers, the entire nation had probably come to a complete standstill. It wouldn't take long for civil unrest to begin. For the Orlesians to look for someone to blame for their circumstances. Many would think it was her, the former Inquisitor. She was the queen in this play. Her reputation sacrificed to force the win. Because while they were looking to attack her for it, he would be moving behind them, cutting off any escape.

"Clever, clever wolf." She remembered how quickly the match had ended after he moved that pawn. Just three moves.

"You have news?" Felassan asked. He startled her and she jumped. She'd been so lost in thought she never even heard him come up the rookery stairs.

"It's rude to sneak up on people."

He grinned. She stuck her tongue out at him and he laughed aloud. "Come, tell me."

"The elves have disappeared from alienages all over Orlais."

"Indeed?"

"Where did he even put them all? There's like, ten thousand elves in Val Royeaux's alienage alone."

"If he has kept to habit, I would say they are all in Harel'Adahlen if they are not in Vir'Abelasan."

Carly translated her way through that. "Rebel's Forest? Where is that?"

"He has not taken you there?"

"No. But I knew he had to have someplace somewhere that wasn't here. It just makes sense."

"It is near the Amaranthine coast in Ferelden, I believe."

Brecilian Forest. Well, that made even more sense. He'd once told her that he oversaw the southern part of what was now Thedas. She sighed, getting back on track. "Still, I worry about the ones who couldn't leave the city. Those on estates, in the palaces."

"I wouldn't worry too much for them. What Fen'Harel didn't collect, Briala is likely to."

"Are you sure? Because this is going to get ugly. I have enough blood on my hands."

"You sound like him."

"I *think* that was a compliment," she teased. The ever present smirk on his face widened. "The army has also mustered and is on its way here."

"Ahh, shall we expect some company soon then?"

"Not for a few weeks, I would imagine. A cross country march this late in the year...I mean, it's nearly Kingsway. What is Gaspard thinking?"

"He is thinking of easy conquest and the righteous indignation of humankind to be thwarted by a mere elf. I've seen it before."

"That's right, you've had...dealings...with him in the past." She looked through the jumble of papers

still left on the work table of the rookery and found a blank strip to write out a response for the Divine.

[We are prepared and safe. On C's discretion for aid.]

Then she approached the raven and held up her arm. The large bird hopped from its perch and she threaded the scrap into the carrier on its leg. “Back to Val Royeaux for you, little messenger.”

She carried the raven to the window casing and let it go. Felassan was watching with bemusement. “You know that ravens are a sign of Dirthamen, yes?”

“Mythologically speaking, or realistically?”

He smirked harder. “Both.”

“They're very intelligent birds.”

“He was a very intelligent man.”

“Intelligence isn't wisdom.”

Felassan snorted. “Ahh, Carly. Your wit could draw blood. There are layers to that statement. Are you aware of them?”

“Yup.” They shared a grin, warm and knowing.

“Shall we take stock of our supplies to make ready for this siege?”

“Yes.”

In the end, there wasn't much to do but wait. Misyl took control of Skyhold's agents, much to Felassan's amusement. He wasn't fooled by her appearance – a stout, matronly cook, routinely dusted with flour – but he had underestimated her strong hand in Solas's followers that remained. In short order, all those able to fight were ready to do so.

“She's a treasure,” Carly said as they discussed it while cozily ensconced in the library with their tea. “I wouldn't know what to do without her, even if she wasn't one of his most faithful servants.”

“She is devoted to you, I think, as much as she is to him.”

“Probably. I'm all right with that.”

“You make him very happy, Carly. I don't know if you're aware of just how much.”

“I think I am. After all, I succeeded where every fictional version failed. He stayed. He didn't fall prey to red lyrium's promise of power. He didn't believe that his only path was the Din'anshiral.” She breathed in the scent of her tea, reveling in it while Felassan digested her words. They had spoken often of layers. By now he'd come to know she was full of them.

He gestured at her mug. “So...you promised to tell me about the tea. I eagerly await.”

She grinned at him and sipped, letting the flavor fill her senses for a moment. “Okay, so you remember that part where I'm from another dimension?”

“I do.”

“I’m a tea drinker. Yeah, I know, figures I’d end up with mister ‘I detest the stuff’. When I first arrived and we were still living in Haven, he used to try and recreate tea for me, based on my memories.”

“On your memories? Through the Fade, I would assume?”

“And you would be wrong,” she laughed. She held up her ceramic hand and clicked the fingers together. “I had the Anchor. It was a bridge. He could hear my thoughts.”

He raised his eyebrows at her. “I’m sure that went just as smoothly as Arlathani wine for both of you.”

She snickered at his sarcasm. “It had some rough spots, for sure. But it was also how he knew I was telling the truth about my origins, and that I really did know everything about him. In any event, he knew I missed things from...home. He took it upon himself to see if he could make the perfect cup of tea for me as I remembered it. Such a little thing, but...”

“It meant everything.” His ever present smirk creased his lips. “Is that why you fell so deeply for him?”

“Oh no, I was already half in love with him from day one. I mean, I already knew it all, all his reasons and motivations. I knew I wanted to help him. Plus, have you seen him? He’s perfect.”

“Beauty being in the eye of the beholder,” he teased.

“Uh huh. I asked him once if all the Evanuris looked like he did. He said more or less.”

“Suffice to say of them all, Fen’Harel *adapted* his features the least. Outwardly, anyway. His alternate form, however...”

“Yeah, I’m guessing since he has the whole wolf motif to himself that he was the only one who shifted that way. The rest were draconic, right?”

“Yes.”

“Anyway,” she went on, sipping from her mug again, “he never got it quite right. Something was always missing, no matter what combination of herbs he used. Until...”

“That morning in Val Royeaux, where a common city elf brew was perfect.”

“Yeah.”

“Now I understand why he actually accepted it and tasted it. For you. To know what he had missed in his recreation.” He looked away from her and rubbed his chin. “You are quite unusual, Carly. You have brought the Rebel Wolf to heel. I hope you know that.”

“I do.”

He smiled at her, warm and full of mischief. “I hope you keep doing it.”

“I shall,” she replied. She lifted her mug to salute him. “To tea.”

He clacked his own against hers. “To tea. And Fen’Harel’s perfect mate.”

A small troop of Sentinels arrived out of the Eluvian two days later, bearing better weapons and a stockpile of food. Abelas and Solas were not among their number, but Revanas was. She eyed Felassan with suspicion, but said nothing. Her troop took up guard positions on the walls without delay and Carly breathed easier.

And finally, three weeks to the day after receiving the raven from Leliana, soldiers were spotted climbing through the pass at the other end of the bridge to Skyhold in the middle of the night. Felassan joined her on the ramparts as the drawbridge was raised. They had gone back to leaving it open so the few people in the keep could come and go to forage before the siege began. She couldn't see the individual soldiers, but she could see the torches they held in the dark. He leaned on his arms and let the wind ruffle his hair. Next to them, Sentinel archers stood ready, but were under her orders not to shoot until Gaspard's army shot first.

"We are very alike, you and I. We both love the Dread Wolf, and all that entails. I failed him once, but in failing, gave you the chance to succeed. And you took it, even if you didn't know it at the time. No matter what happens, I will see you back to his side."

"Thank you, Felassan," she whispered.

He pulled out the twig he routinely carried his staff disguised as and right before her eyes grew it out to its full length. He bowed to her, deeply and with more genuine respect than she thought him capable of. He wasn't the easygoing companion of the last several weeks anymore. He was a battle tested warrior who had fought a rebellion at the side of Fen'Harel.

"Go back inside, Da'Fen. Where you will be safe."

She went.

Of course, she couldn't sleep again. She sat in Solas's chair in the rotunda and looked at the murals. From outside the keep she could hear occasional thumps and clanks, but nothing that worried her. Skyhold was impregnable by anything less than a dragon. The cliffs all around it were sheer drops into the slopes below, the only access was the bridge. With the portcullises down and the drawbridge up, there would be no entry save by deception. She had little fear of betrayal, considering everyone left at the fortress was either hand picked by Solas, or had sworn loyalty to her as Inquisitor. But stranger things had happened. She wouldn't get complacent.

At some point, she knew she would have to let Gaspard see her, to know she was here and not in Val Royeaux. She needed his army to see her. Rumors of her being at the head of this aggression against Orlais would die quicker if overpowered by rumors of her locked in her stony tower, seemingly powerless and weak. She had to play her part as the sacrificed queen on the board.

"Queen to F6. Check."

"And now my Ben'Hassrath takes your queen," Bull's voice said in her memory. "You've got no towers, you're down to a single mage. Too bad you wasted time moving that pawn to...to..."

There was a murmur of noise coming from the Great Hall, where all the civilians left in the keep had gathered to stay out of the way. Carly roused herself from her reveries and went to see what the commotion was about. She stood in the doorway and saw Solas marching in from the garden entrance, decked out fully in his god armor. She smiled.

"You sneaky son of a bitch," she whispered to herself, finishing Bull's line.

Chapter End Notes

So. Much. Chess. Heaps of kudos and ma serannas to lethallantv for having the machinima video detailing the Immortal Game banter still available. I could have found it by other means, but I love that video so very much and wanted to give it a shoutout.

(I was gonna post a link, but it appears the site is either not there anymore or is under construction.)

Also: OMG, thank you readers, thank you. I'm very nearly speechless. Over 30K hits...

A Fitting Counterplay

Chapter Notes

2/16/21

Solas saw Carly and changed course to come to her side. They held each other tight for a moment and he kissed her hair. She asked, "Halamshiral?"

"In Abelas's hands. The humans did not see us coming and the fighting was relatively short. The city surrendered rather than be slaughtered."

"Good." She looked up at him. "How are we playing this?"

"I have a token for Grand Duke Gaspard. He will not be able to deny its value." He gestured behind where they stood and she saw a pair of Sentinels escorting a young woman in from the garden. She looked terrified.

"A hostage?"

"An opportunity for exchange," Solas clarified. Carly tugged him down for a single kiss, then let him go.

"That's generally what hostage means, ma fen. Who is she?"

"His mistress, I believe. I shall see you soon, vhenan. Stay here, where I will not worry."

"I should go with you. Gaspard needs to see that I'm here. More specifically, his army needs to see it. Propaganda can only take their loyalty so far when faced with facts."

"Hmm. You are not wrong, although I do not like it."

"Yeah, I know."

"Come then."

He marched off again, taking the young woman's arm in a gentle but firm grip while she followed behind, flanked by the Sentinels. The day had dawned while she sat in the rotunda, the sky cloudy and gray.

Once they were on the ramparts, she saw that Gaspard himself stood at the head of his gathered army, scowling fiercely across the gap of the raised drawbridge as if he could lower it with will alone. One of his men nudged him and he looked up at them. At her, Solas and the hostage at his side. Even from where she stood, she saw the Grand Duke blanch. The soldiers around him shuffled on their feet, unsure of what to do. Carly stood next to her lover, safe within the bubble of his barrier. She leaned forward so Gaspard could clearly see her. His expression was both incredulous and thunderous.

"On dhea, Grand Duke Gaspard," she called down from the ramparts. "I regret to inform you that Tarasyl'an Tel'as is not accepting petitioners today."

"I demand your full and complete surrender, rabbit. I will not offer mercy twice."

"And why do you think I would do that? The way I see it, your Grace, you have encroached on *my* territory. You are the aggressor here. As you can see, I am not in Val Royeaux fomenting whatever it is you told people I was in order to justify an attack on me. And you have precious little maneuverability here. Unless you learn to fly, you're not getting inside these walls."

"You have overstepped your bounds. This land was granted to the Inquisition for its use, but it is not yours to keep."

"Correction. This land was granted to the Inquisition to *borrow*. It never belonged to the organization. It is the rightful property of Fen'Harel. And here he is," she gestured to her side, where Solas stood calmly. The hostage whimpered beside him. "You're in no position to make demands, Gaspard."

"I will starve you out, knife ear. You and all your filthy elves will die slow, excruciating deaths and they will know it was from your own recalcitrance to make peace. They will cast you aside and beg to open the gates to me."

Carly laughed, projecting it out so it carried across the distance. There was only so much of being the bigger person that would be believed after all. "And into your mercy at the point of a sword like your forebears did to theirs? Honestly, do you really think we're trapped here? Look at the woman, Gaspard. Look at her. I see you know her face. Do you think she was brought here by any road? How could she, when you and your invaders have had them all choked with your trampling feet. Tell me, where should she be? Halamshiral, perhaps?"

A ripple of unease went through the ranks of soldiers. From where she stood, Carly could see the knowledge being passed from row to row across the bridge. The faces turned up to them on the walls looked less superior and smug as realization set in that this was probably a useless stalemate. That it wasn't a stalemate at all. The elves of Skyhold held the winning pieces. She smiled down at the bridge.

"Autumn is harsh in the Frostbacks, Duke Gaspard. I do hope you brought plenty of blankets for your men. I would hate for them to freeze to death needlessly. I will be conferring with Empress Celene while you do. I haven't given up hope that more intelligent heads will prevail. If you leave, we will release the hostages of Halamshiral into your keeping. If you do not, we will trade one of their lives for each one of ours that you take. And make no mistake, I do not mean simply the lives within these walls. But all those of my people. If I hear of violence in retribution against the remaining elves of Orlais, I will turn the human population of Halamshiral to ash. A fitting exchange after the Purge a few years ago, don't you agree? Good day to you, your Grace."

She stepped back on the rampart, away from the eyes of the Orlesian soldiers below. She was shaking with the adrenaline rush. This was a dangerous gambit, she knew. She didn't worry for her or Solas, or even for their forces. But she was terrified on behalf of those trapped outside their influence.

Solas turned over the hostage to the waiting Sentinels and wrapped an arm around her, supporting her before she fell over. "You did well, vhenan," he whispered. "Come, let us return to the keep."

Misyl greeted them as soon as they reached the main courtyard. She murmured to Solas that she would take over for now and led Carly to the warmth of the kitchen, where she pushed her to a chair in a corner and handed her a mug of something hot. "Drink it, my Lady."

Carly sipped, expecting nothing more than tea. The shocking burn of alcohol hit her throat and she

sputtered. "What?"

"Hot mulled brandy. You deserve something stronger than tea after that performance."

Carly drank her toddy and Misyl bustled around the kitchen, directing her cooks to keep working on the midday meal. Carly let the normalcy of the scene seep into her as surely as the heat from her drink. She'd made her play, now all she could do was wait.

Felassan and Revanas departed from Skyhold with a message to Celene while Solas remained, keeping a careful watch on the army. The bulk of it had retreated across the bridge to camp at the far end, leaving a token force at the drawbridge to keep an eye on them. Not that there was anything to see. The defenders were free to move around the middle courtyard, safe behind the raised planks of the drawbridge as well as two lowered portcullises. Daily she could hear troops training, their normally soft Elvhen voices raised high so that Gaspard's token guards could hear them over the walls. A trick to fool the Orlesians into thinking they held far more forces in Skyhold than they did. Carly would happily grasp any leverage she could get.

Just as she kept their hostage where everyone could see her, confined to the mezzanine that Vivienne had once made her home. The woman was not truly imprisoned so much as sequestered. Not that she had any interest in mingling with Carly's civilians, since they were all elves. But she had space, all the comforts they could provide, reading material if she wanted it and a balcony with which to look over the fortress and out across the bridge.

Ravens arrived too, on the heels of their returning agents. Carly found herself just staying in the rookery to receive them, reading and sending back endless intel between herself and the Inquisition. It appeared Celene had sent forces of her own to Halamshiral and confirmed that it was now firmly in elven hands, the human population locked in to the High Quarter. Carly refused to feel any guilt over that, considering the conditions the city elves had been living in for generations.

Divine Victoria had pleaded with the Empress for peace and diplomacy, pointing out that no evidence suggested Carly had done anything but defend herself against an attempt on her life and a threat to her home. Orlais truly was in the wrong. Negotiations began to meet for parley. It took several rounds to come to a decision, but in the end, Suledin Keep was chosen for the meeting place. Carly didn't mention that *that* belonged to Solas as well, in the absence of any previous owners now remaining. The next raven that came mentioned that Alistair would be there too, to mediate and perhaps work out a treaty for Ferelden with the fledgling elven nation. As if it was a foregone conclusion that she would win back the Dales. That gave her more hope than she'd had before.

Carly was satisfied, and preparations were begun for the journey.

"Are we going to have to cross Emprise du Lion to get there?" she asked Solas the night it was settled. They were tucked up together on the sofa in front of the fire in her chamber, the balcony doors closed and warded against both chill and potential surprises.

"No. It was not outside the realm of possibility as a location for peace talks, and I have already restored an Eluvian within the Keep itself."

"You know, it's kinda cool seeing that agile mind at work," she said, tipping back her head so she could look at him. In the fire glow, his face was shadowed and pensive. And so beloved.

He smiled gently. "It is hardly my first experience in these matters."

"I know," she whispered.

"You are doing well, vhenan. I am not the only one with cleverness."

"Thank you."

"Are you anxious?"

"No. Not really. Leliana will be there, acting as Divine. And King Alistair will be there, on behalf of Ferelden. I imagine he and Anora are thinking it would be a good thing to have a buffer between their nation and Orlais that's more readily on the defensive than say...just a mountain range. And you'll be there. I'm never nervous with you at my back." Solas hummed, and the tone of it was playful. She grinned. "Okay, not like that, you wolf. And I'm still never nervous. You're good to me. C'mere."

He leaned down and met her kiss. It grew heated quickly and she turned over in his arms to get closer. They hadn't had much time together since the Qunari attack. She missed him. He pulled her legs around him and slid his hands under her butt. She broke away from his lips to give him a look.

"Is the Dread Wolf about to take me?"

"Should he, vhenan?" Solas whispered huskily.

"Yes, he should. Several times, perhaps."

"Ma nuvenin."

He stood up with her in his arms and carried her to the bed.

There had been some confusion among the ranks of Orlesian soldiers that Carly and Solas wouldn't be traveling with them to Emprise du Lion. Gaspard himself scowled angrily when she tossed over the wall that she'd get there before he did and that he shouldn't worry about it. He left the bulk of the army blockading Skyhold while he rode off, disappearing from sight at the other end of the bridge. Carly just smirked and tightened her cloak around herself. They were leaving Revanas in charge of the fortress, and bringing Felassan with them. She wasn't sure if that was because Solas still didn't trust him on his own, or that he *did* trust him enough to help keep Carly safe.

They left Skyhold four days later. The trip through the network was fairly short and uneventful. They arrived at Suledin Keep in just a few hours, the afternoon light filtering down on them from cracks in the walls and ground above them. Felassan was silent as they climbed the central stairs that would lead to the exposed rooftop courtyard. Solas sealed the entrance once they were through it, and Felassan finally seemed to have gotten together his gumption to say something about what remained of his one time leader's old home.

"Fen'Harel, I'm..."

"Do not," Solas barked, although it wasn't as coldly as it might have been. Felassan fell silent again. He and Carly exchanged a glance and she shook her head. It still wasn't a topic Solas liked to talk about.

Inquisition forces remained on site, and Carly caught up with Baron Desjardins on what had been

happening in her absence. It was evident he didn't want to tell her, but politeness kept the conversation going. The trio settled into one of the larger tents, and while the two elves wandered she visited with the scouts, who were much friendlier.

In the morning, Celene and Divine Victoria were expected, and not long after, Grand Duke Gaspard and King Alistair. And then it would be time to finish this.

An End In Sight

Chapter Notes

2/19/21

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Inquisitor Pentaghost, I didn't expect to see you here,” Carly said, coming to stand next to Cass as she oversaw the construction of a heavy walled tent that would serve as the meeting place. The Seeker eyed her askance in an attempt to remain aloof, but it didn't last long and her face warmed with a small smile.

“Comtesse Lavellan,” she replied, in keeping with the formality of the occasion, “The Inquisition provided an escort to the Most Holy and her Imperial Majesty. And I am here to observe.”

“A neutral party?”

“Something like that. I may be Inquisitor now, but I am Nevarran. Orlesian politics do not interest me.”

“It's good to see you, Cassandra.” Carly cracked a smile.

Cass sighed before she returned it. “And you, Carly. I have been worried for you.”

“I'm fine.”

“So I see. Who is the companion with Solas?”

“That is Felassan, former agent of Fen'Harel and fellow Elvhen.”

“*Former* agent?”

“Long story. Let's just say he's on probation. And he's played a role in this too.”

“Was he behind the attack on Halamshiral?”

“No, that was my idea. I told Celene I wanted the Dales back, as payment for all I've given in service to Thedas. For all that elves as a whole have given. She refused, and Gaspard tried to have me assassinated. And now we're here.”

“Lel...Divine Victoria told me as much.”

“How is the Empress taking this?”

“I do not fully know. She does not speak of it with me. I think she is angry at Gaspard's overbearance, however. She has always favored diplomacy rather than brute force.”

“Well, she's shown her hand once or twice too. She's not above being ruthless.”

“No, she is not. And neither are you, it seems.”

“Needs must. I won't let this go. My people have suffered enough at the hands of humans.”

“I do not disagree.”

There was a commotion to the side of the open courtyard and Carly and Cass turned to see what it was. Empress Celene was approaching, Divine Victoria in her wake. Grand Duke Gaspard was there too, already yelling. “I'm telling you, cousin, this entire meeting is a farce. My spies would have seen her leave that fortress, and they did not. She isn't here. And meanwhile my entire force is halfway across the world from us and we are vulnerable.”

“Good afternoon, your Grace. I would hardly call Skyhold halfway across the world. It's in the mountains, not Tevinter,” Carly greeted him. She nodded politely to the Empress too while Gaspard sputtered. Behind the little group she saw Alistair, his face set in a carefully neutral expression, although it looked like he wanted to laugh. The quirked eyebrow gave him away. “Shall we begin?”

“How did you get here?” Gaspard demanded, marching up to her, his breath puffing around his face as he worked to catch it. It was easier to see, here in mixed company, how portly and undisciplined the militant Grand Duke had become since the events of the Winter Palace. Complacent and fat, Carly thought. And now shamed publicly.

“The elves of Skyhold have other means of transport available to them, your Grace. We arrived by Eluvian.”

“Magic mirrors and trickery,” he spat, his eyes narrowing at her through his mask. His smooth voice caught and choked in rage. She had to tread carefully. Setting him off would end poorly for them both. Then again, Gaspard had never known when to quit and his next words proved it. “You filthy elves should not have that kind of power.”

It wouldn't be an auspicious beginning, but Carly had no intention of letting him – or Celene, for that matter – walk all over her. She fixed the Grand Duke with a hard stare. “That power was created and built by the antecedents of those you seek to disparage, your Grace. Be careful how you speak of my people to my face. We are not in the court of Orlais anymore, and I have more capability here than you can imagine. Do not presume to think you are a threat to me, or that your bullying tactics will win you any favor. I have let you live thus far, Gaspard. Don't test my patience.”

“Why you...!”

“Enough,” Celene called sharply. Gaspard stood back, his face turning a rather unhealthy shade of purple. “We are here to negotiate for peace, cousin. I would advise you to silence for your own benefit.”

Carly gave Celene a polite bow and gestured for the rest of them to enter the tent first. Alistair hung back, clearly entertained if a touch intimidated.

“This makes the Blight look easy,” he said.

“I'm sure. I'm glad you're here. This is more than a simple feud between humans and elves, this will change the face of Thedas. Ferelden is neutral, but equally as affected by it. It will be good that you can remind them of that.”

“As you say, Inquisitor. Or are you just Comtesse Lavellan now?”

“Comtesse is fine, your Highness.”

He smiled and offered her his arm. They went into the tent.

When it came down to it, Celene appeared to have reconsidered her stance on returning the Dales, probably because Leliana had applied Chantry pressure. The meeting felt mostly like a marketplace haggle rather than a negotiation. Cassandra stood in one corner of the tent, behind Celene and Gaspard, while Solas stood behind Carly on her side of the table with Alistair. Leliana was at the head, overseeing both sides. There was less tension than Carly expected, although that wasn't to say there wasn't any tension at all. She didn't trust it would last, though, and she was proven correct in very short order.

“You expect me to give up my ancestral holdings in the Exalted Plains and the Emerald Graves?” Gaspard argued, still flushed and growing angry.

“As well as any holdings in Halamshiral itself,” Carly said. “There will be no land in the Dales held by human hands. That's the point of this.”

“And where is my garrison supposed to go?”

Carly leaned back, away from his attempts to look physically threatening across the table. With studious calm she regarded him with her hands folded neatly in front of her. She made sure to keep her prosthetic hand well displayed. Not for one moment could they be allowed to forget what she'd sacrificed for them.

“As a loyal subject of Empress Celene, I would imagine that is between you and her. It is of no import to me.”

“I stand to lose the most in this agreement,” he scowled. “And the incomes I derive from those lands? There has been no mention of how I am to be compensated for that. If you want these lands, I suggest you pay for them.”

Leliana shifted in her seat, ready to interject something. Carly held up her hand before the Divine could speak, however. “Grand Duke Gaspard, in 2:10 Glory, Divine Renata I called for an Exalted March against my people. Whereupon Orlesian troops entered the Dales and *crushed* it under their heel over the course of ten years. Elves were forced to leave their homes, their livelihoods, and everything they owned on threat of death. They were then forbidden to speak their own language or practice their own religion.”

She looked around the table, making sure she held all of their gazes. “In the 700 years since, my people have toiled for you, bled for you, died under your thumb. They have bowed and scraped and endured every abuse humans have heaped on them. Be content that I am allowing your people to leave in peace and not at the point of a sword. Be content that I am not requiring 700 years worth of monetary compensation for the suffering your nation has inflicted upon them. Your estates and the income you procure at the expense of my people is an exchange I am willing to accept in lieu of it.”

She eyed Gaspard in particular. It was time to let him know that she was fully aware of his attempt to have her assassinated. “Be grateful I am not also calling for your life after you tried to take mine while under the hospitality of the Empress during a celebration for what I've done for Thedas.”

“That is a powerful accusation,” Alistair commented. “Can you prove it?”

Carly pulled out the dagger from that night in the palace and laid it on the table. “The assassin that

waited for me in my guest quarters was armed with this. Take a good look at it. This is the weapon of a nobleman, for sure. I would imagine the Grand Duke still has its twin, daggers like this always seem to come in pairs. Furthermore, Divine Victoria holds the remains of the assassin himself. She can vouch for the validity of the accusation.”

A silence fell in the tent and for a moment Carly dared to hope that Gaspard would be suitably cowed by the evidence that he wouldn't do anything foolish. She didn't hold her breath on it though, and when he leapt across the table, trying to snatch up the dagger, she merely backed away and got to her feet closer to Solas, thankful that she hadn't let down her guard.

“The world will be grateful to me for eliminating you, you upstart bitch!” he shouted.

The crackle of flesh to stone was loud in the enclosed space. The statue of Grand Duke Gaspard fell onto the table with a heavy thud, splayed out in the leaping position he'd been in. Celene, Alistair and Cassandra all jumped back, shock on their faces. Leliana was looking over Carly's shoulder where Solas was undoubtedly still glowy-eyed. Carly stood still and didn't actually take a breath until his hand landed on her shoulder. She turned to the Empress.

“I am not without mercy, Empress Celene. Orlesians may leave the Dales in peace. But make no mistake, I will not tolerate further violence against me, or my people. This,” she gestured to the statue, “is the consequence of opposing me.”

“I...understand.”

“I think seizure of Gaspard's wealth and lands to be distributed among the elves of the Dales is a suitable compensation for this act. As well as a definitive conclusion to these talks. Do you concede?”

“I do, Comtesse Lavellan.” The Empress couldn't seem to tear her eyes away from the stony face of her long time rival, her cousin, and her downfall. It wasn't until Leliana drew out the parchment treaty she'd prepared and laid it in front of Celene did the woman look away from the statue and back to Carly. “Orlais sues for peace with the Dales.”

“Are you all right, vhenan?” Solas asked as soon as the others left the tent. Carly stepped into his arms and just let him hold her for a moment. She nodded against his chestplate, her ceramic fingers scraping on his back.

“I'm fine.” She finally pulled back and looked up at him. The pride on his face was unmistakable. “I did it. Holy fuckballs, I actually did it.”

He huffed a laugh through his nose and held her close again. “You did.”

She started to laugh then, joyful, relieving. “I don't think reality has sunken in yet.”

“Soon enough it will.”

“We have so much to do.”

“Yes.”

Hand in hand they left the tent. Alistair was waiting for her outside, his fair hair shining in the late afternoon sun as it splashed through the open arches of Suledin Keep. “Comtesse, or should I call you Queen of the Dales now?”

Carly stopped suddenly. Well, that was going to be a tangle and a half. The Dales were hers, weren't they? She had an entire government to plan now. Slowly she shook her head. "No, no monarchs in the Dales. The rest of Thedas has shown just how poorly that works out in the long run."

Alistair gave her a thoughtful look, then grinned. It made him look very young. Carly reminded herself that while he had been King Consort in Ferelden for over ten years, he wasn't much older than she was. A few years at most. "I just wanted to say," he continued after a moment, "that I will be releasing a proclamation that the elves of Ferelden are free to leave for the Dales if they want to. I will not hold them back."

"Thank you." She held out her hand. He took it smoothly and raised it to his lips instead of just shaking it.

"Ferelden looks forward to a long and peaceful reign, regardless of what you call yourself."

She grinned and after he nodded to them both, he left. She looked up at Solas. "Home?"

"If you like."

"We have unfinished business. Or I should say, you do. I want to see this through before I'm swamped with running a whole country."

"Ma nuvenin."

She gave a last look around the Inquisition camp while Solas gestured for Felassan to come back with them. She took a deep breath and it finally sank in. She'd done it. She'd won the Dales. Now only one thing remained.

Chapter End Notes

And then there were two chapters left...

The Music Plays On

Chapter Notes

2/23/21

Are you ready?

(I am not ready.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Are you still doing math, ma fen?” Carly asked as she wandered into the rotunda to see him hunched over his table, furiously scribbling in his tidy script. He didn't answer, but stuck out his free hand, twining their fingers together when she reached for him. Still writing, he brought her hand to his lips and held it there, absently. She would have laughed but she didn't want to interrupt him further. These calculations were essential and needed to be precise.

He finally finished whatever equation he was working on and sat back, placing a kiss on her knuckles. “I believe I am ready to begin.”

“Just like that, huh? I thought it might feel more...momentous.”

He smirked at her, his eyes shining. “I trust it will feel so in time.” He stood up and wrapped an arm around her, leading her back out of the rotunda. Her sending crystal swung around his neck. She spared a thought at the humor of him wearing her crystal, while she wore his jawbone. She also wondered how long he'd talked to Dorian before burning the poor man's brain out. “Your idea to triangulate the spell was sound. The analogy of a sequential harmony to hold back the existing portion of the Veil...” He trailed off, shaking his head. “And here you have no magical talent at your disposal. How did you think of it?”

“There's always been some assumption that the Veil is like a sound wave, a resonance rather than a physical barrier. You yourself have told me that magic is a symphony. Not a hard analogy to make from there.” She paused and laughed. “And I can't take the credit. I read it in a fanwork.”

“A what?”

“Remember headcannons?”

“Yes.”

“Right, some people take theirs and write them down in stories. Like Varric. Then they would publish them for anyone to read. It's...it's a bit hard to explain.”

“And someone thought of this and wrote about it?” He raised an eyebrow at her.

“Yeah. One of the best fics I ever read. It stuck with me.”

“Evidently so. Well, this person's theory is quite good and I believe my math is better,” he added with a sly grin. “Once I have the proper apparatuses, I can begin.”

“What do you need for that?”

“Foci would be ideal, but I know that is an impossible expectation. Most likely runes.”

“And that will work?”

“If they are properly aligned, and crafted with enough care, I do not see why not.”

“That's amazing.”

“Indeed.”

They measured out four points in the end, all equidistant from Skyhold, creating a giant rectangle among the peaks of the Frostbacks. Through a quickly decided agreement with the Avvar, the southern end of the rectangle fell across portions of their land as well, earning them favor among the Avvar 'gods'. The Augurs were pleased.

Journeying to each spot to place the deceptively plain stone runes was much more arduous, especially since it was late Harvestmere before he was ready to activate them. Snow swirled around them as they placed the anchor points. Felassan joined them, lending his magical strength to Solas's to permanently affix the runes to the ground.

“I have to say, I expected there would be some kind of...I dunno...*effect* right away,” Carly said to the pair of them as they made their way from the final anchor and back to the Eluvian that would return them to Skyhold.

“There is,” Felassan said before Solas could start up a long-winded explanation. Solas frowned at him and he grinned impishly. “She's not a mage yet, Fen'Harel. She can't feel it.” He turned back to her and held up his hand, conjuring a flame to it. It burned steadily, even in the wind coming off the nearby peaks. “It is easier for me to sustain this, here, between his anchor points, than it would be anywhere else. Except for maybe some battlefield where the Veil is already in shreds. But this is stable, see?”

He rolled the flame across his hand, back and forth, as if it was nothing more than a bright glowing ball. Then he cupped it in his palm again and split the flame into four parts, shaping the smaller pieces until they looked like dancing figures. Only when Solas cleared his throat behind them did he let them go.

“You are showing off, ma falon.”

Felassan gave him a sardonic look. “As if you are not about to show off to the world. Again.”

“Boys,” Carly interrupted before they could get into one-upping each other. It was a constant between them, she'd found. Equal parts rivalry and camaraderie. She shook her head at them both and waved a hand towards the Eluvian. “Pissing contests are only allowed when I can get away from you.”

“Ma nuvenin, Da'Fen,” Felassan said with a mocking bow. Solas scowled at him, but he let it go quickly to smirk at her. He took her hand and kissed it pointedly. Carly rolled her eyes at both of them.

When they were back at Skyhold, Carly watched Solas from the stairs that led into the Great Hall. He was measuring out a space on the ground near the entrance to the dungeon. He walked in a

circle, occasionally casting some small sigil into the dirt. The rest of the fortress was empty now, save the pair of them and the oldest Sentinels. And Felassan.

“Is he trying to mark the same spot as where he created the Veil in the first place?” Carly asked him as he came and sat with her on the landing.

Felassan regarded her with a surprised air about him. “How did you know that?”

“He showed me the memory of him making it. In the Fade.”

“He showed you...do you have *any* idea what kind of trust that took?”

She met Felassan's eyes and nodded. “I do.”

“You are breathtaking, you know that?”

“Why?”

“No one, not Andruil on her best day, not even Mythal herself, gained so much of his trust. Carly...” He trailed off, letting out a breathless laugh. “You are incomparable, Da'Fen Lavellan.”

“I think he needed me to be,” she said softly. She looked down in time to see Solas write a final sigil on the ground. All at once, a flowing circle lit up, the magic creating a 3-dimensional sphere around him. He nodded, seemingly satisfied, and walked out of it. It remained in place, glowing softly on its own.

Felassan wrapped an arm around her and gave her a squeeze. “I think you're right.”

Solas came up the steps and found them together giving him identical impatient faces. He cocked an eyebrow at them and held out his hand for Carly to take. “You two spend too much time together. Should I be concerned?”

His tone was playful and Carly grinned at him. “I only have eyes for you, Fen'Harel.”

“Hmm.” He leaned down and kissed her while Felassan made exaggerated gagging noises behind them. Carly bit her lip to keep from laughing as Solas scowled over her shoulder. “It is hardly my fault Revanas rejected you.”

“Wait...what?” Carly whirled around to Felassan, who still sat on the stone of the stairs, looking slightly sheepish. “Revanas?”

Felassan's eyes danced. “I never said she rejected me, Fen'Harel. Perhaps we practice more discretion, is all.”

Solas snorted. Carly was still trying to wrap her head around the idea of steady Revanas and Felassan. Truth be told, it wasn't a bad match. Revanas had a playful side when she wasn't on duty, just as Felassan could manage to conjure a serious one when he needed to.

“You have not practiced discretion in five thousand years,” Solas said.

“Come now, you know that's not true.”

“Boys, you're doing it again.” They both subsided and she felt a burbling laugh at the back of her throat at how easily they both acquiesced to her demands. It made her remember what Felassan had said about Solas and strong-willed women. She cleared her throat and tried to get them back on track. “Okay, so what's next?”

“Now I must attune myself to the frequency of the Veil. It will likely take a while.”

It was Felassan's turn to snort as he got up and brushed himself off. “He means it will be days, Carly. I can't say I blame him, though. The details are...”

“Intricate,” she finished for him. They both nodded. “All right, are you going to need anything first?”

“Some food, some rest. My orb.”

“Okay, we can do those.”

Days, they'd told her. It was a week. He stood in the center of his glowing circle, the orb resting on a makeshift pillar of plain stone between his hands as he fed power into it, amplifying it as he reached equilibrium with the signature of the harmonics that made the Veil. Carly checked on him now and then, making sure he hadn't just straight up died, but Felassan assured her that Solas was fine.

“This kind of magic...it's time consuming.”

“I mean, I kinda knew that? I've just never seen it in action. His memories...they flew by in no time.”

“As memories often do. What other memories has he shown you, if I might ask?”

“He showed me what he did to the Black City.” She shook her head and shrugged in a helpless sort of way. “He was gone for nearly two months, but showing me what he'd done only took...okay, it wasn't *no* time. Dorian said it was two days.”

“I look forward to meeting this Tevinter mage. He seems quite...intriguing.”

“Oh, I expect you two will get along like a house on fire.”

“That is a strange idiom.”

“I suppose it is,” she agreed with a laugh. “Earth saying.”

“Are you sorry to leave your world behind?”

“No. Everything I love is here.”

“Good,” he said. Solas looked up then, meeting both their gazes with his own ablaze. “It's time,” Felassan said. “He wanted me to take you to the Eluvian, just in case.”

“Just in case the whole place decides to explode instead?”

“Something like that.”

“How nice of him to mention it sooner,” she said wryly.

“Carly...”

“No. I need to see this. And if it all goes wrong and he ends up a pile of Fade goop, you honestly think I'm going to want to keep living? Without him?”

Felassan sighed. "Fine. But he can't see us, or he'll stop."

"C'mon, I know where we can go."

She tugged his hand and they went into the Great Hall. She hurried to the mezzanine level, dousing them both in a stealth grenade before they went out onto the balcony overlooking the courtyard. If Solas suspected they were there, he gave no sign of it. The sphere around him was expanding, growing steadily larger until it began to swallow the walls of the fortress, creeping across the ground, picking up speed as he fed more power into it.

It continued to grow, continued to pick up speed, now climbing the outer wall, the guard towers, the keep itself. She could still see Solas at the center of it, blurry and indistinct. His orb was a spark of light in between his hands, green and vibrant as the raw Fade itself. All at once the spell took hold and flashed out like lightning, spreading out towards the distant anchor points. It flowed over her and Felassan like a tidal wave, blowing her right off her feet. Felassan caught her before she fell. The stealth was blasted away.

When she opened her eyes, the world had changed. From the corner of her eye she could see movement, but when she looked directly at it, nothing was there. There were colors hovering at the edges of her perception, tastes almost familiar on her tongue, scents long forgotten tickling her nose. She felt like she was going to sneeze. Felassan let her go when he saw her steady on her feet and she watched him tip back his head like he was soaking up the sun, breathing deep. There was a tingle on her skin, almost a buzzing sensation like a thunderstorm brewing too close for comfort.

When she went back to the balcony railing, Solas was looking up at her. Even from the distance between the balcony and the courtyard she could see his raised eyebrow at her. She grinned back, too full of joy to feel admonished.

The first wisps could be seen now, appearing out of thin air. Followed by other, larger spirits. There were many shapes she didn't recognize, although there were a couple she did. She'd never seen Pride in any form other than demon. Their natural state wasn't much different, but there was no malice coming off them as they clustered around Solas. He was moving slowly through the throng; it was too hard to see if he was speaking to them.

"Whole, healthy, happy," a voice said in her ear. Carly smiled.

"Hello, sweetie."

"Searching, searing, smiling, spirit soaring. A thousand years it would take to unravel, but you'll have them now. Reborn, renewed, returned. All returning. The magic is real. Drawing breath as a newborn. Wonder, worry, work. There is so much work now."

"Yes there is."

"You chose to stay. The Fade listened. New spirits born today. Mother, maker, mentor. They are all you." His head turned a little bit, and she saw him look at Solas. She hadn't even heard him come up the mezzanine stairs. "Serendipity, strength, *saved*. You saved him. Now the world is right. Unbroken, unshackled, unveiled."

Solas reached them, his face at peace. Carly held his hands in hers, feeling the buzz under her skin grow like static. He smiled at her before turning to the spirit boy. "Hello, Cole. How do you feel?"

It was so mundane. The same question he asked Cole all the time. Keeping tabs on how the elgar'venathe was dealing with being in a body. She wondered if Cole would give it up, return to

the Fade wholly a spirit, or if he would stay too. She supposed, at least here in Skyhold where the Veil was now held back, it didn't matter.

“I feel *good*,” Cole said. “Today is good.”

“Yes, it is.”

Chapter End Notes

Elgar'venathe - 'walking spirit', a term for a spirit who has taken on a physical body.
Borrowed with permission from queenofkadara.

The fic that Carly loved so much is one that I love too. Harellanart's Unending Wake: Dreamers Often Lie. Read it here:
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/11795196/chapters/26603358>

And then there was just a single chapter left....

The Promise Kept**

Chapter Notes

2/26/21

I promised a happy ending, and now I shall deliver...

NSFW

You didn't think this fic would go out without a 'bang', did you?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Her crystal lit up and she tapped it to activate the call. “Hey, Dorian.”

“Carly,” he said, sounding like he'd been running. “Did he do it? There are fluctuations in the Veil all over the place.”

She smiled. “Yes, he took it down completely at Skyhold while keeping the rest whole for now.”

“It worked?”

“Yes, perfectly.” She held the crystal in her ceramic fingers, conjuring up sparks in her good hand that she knew he wouldn't be able to see, but still gave her such a thrill she couldn't stop doing it.

“D, I can do magic.”

There was a satisfied sound through the crystal. She could just picture his face, smug, eyes snapping with humor. He was probably even twirling his mustache. “What type, my dear?”

“Electricity.” She snorted. “Is that any surprise? I mean, I carried Solas's Anchor for years, I'm sure that had something to do with it.”

“I'm sure,” he agreed. “Anything else?”

“Well, I seem to have the same affinity for spirits that I had before. So, what do you think...spirit mage?”

Dorian sighed. “Quite likely. It will be interesting to see if you retain any Somniari abilities as well.”

“Ooh, you're right.”

“I'm glad for you, Carly.”

“Thanks, D.” She let go of the sparks and looked around her chamber, filled with wisps and small Curiosities. “Hey, where are you guys now?”

“The Nevarran border. The hand off went well. I hear rumors that you have been busy while we were away.” His tone implied he knew all about the reclaiming of the Dales. “Honestly, Carly, I leave you alone for five minutes...”

“I did everything I set out to do, Dorian. You know that?”

He sighed again. "I do. So what's next for you?"

"Becoming a mage, I guess. And building a government from the ground up. No kings or queens in the Dales. Only a democratically elected parliament. With term limits. And checks and balances. My people are free, at least in the South. I guess my next move will be convincing Tevinter to hand over its slaves."

"You never think small, do you?"

"Nope."

"I'll be there to help, I promise."

"Good."

Carly lay back against the pile of pillows and gasped to get her breath back. She was a sweaty mess and her limbs tingled in the best way. Solas rested in the cradle of her legs, leaning over her on his elbows, the glint in his eye still devilish.

"All right, ma fen, what else can you do with all those fancy returned powers of rewriting reality?" she asked. He raised an eyebrow at her and looked around their chamber. Wisps floated on the air, simple spirits drawn by their passion and love. Solas waved his fingers.

The chamber was suddenly filled with living trees, the floor turned to moss. She was fairly certain she could hear water running and saw her desk now sitting on a flat rock surrounded by a trickling stream that ran off from nowhere to the balcony where it cascaded over the edge. The lanterns and candles were gone, replaced with something very like moonlight but warmer. She grinned at him. But he wasn't done. He sat up on his knees, looking over the creation he'd made. Another flick of his hand and there were flowers now in between the trees, bright blossoms that perfumed the air with something so sweet and delicate that Carly couldn't place it.

He looked back down at her, his eyes aglow and she felt the bed change under her. It grew softer and more comfortably supportive, the sweaty sheets replaced with downy fresh ones that smelled like sunlight. Without speaking, he leaned over her and fanned her hair out from beneath her head, spilling it across her pillow. Only then did he stop.

"And how is my lady's bower?" he asked.

"It's lovely, thank you."

"You are so beautiful here, like this."

"You say that like you're never going to let me up again."

"Perhaps I shall not." He gestured to the chamber. "We have everything we need right at our fingertips."

She giggled. The year was closing out. The Dales were filling with aravels and halla and city elves from all over Thedas. The treaty with Orlais was holding, as was the one with Ferelden. Several Avvar tribes had sent apprentices to study at the feet of those Elvhen willing to teach them, which ended up being more than Carly expected, if she was going to be honest. Life was pretty perfect for the first time in...forever. And for the first time since she'd fallen from the Breach from her world to his, they had nowhere to be. Nothing to do. At least for the moment.

Carly reached for Solas again. Only one thing could make it better. “C'mere, ma fen. I want you again.”

“Ma nuvenin,” he whispered, her favorite naughty smile on his lips.

He slid into her arms, letting her fingers brush up his tattoos and around his neck. She threaded her fingers into his hair and tugged it, earning herself a low groan from him before he kissed her. He lay flush against her, and she wrapped her legs around him. She felt sublime in his arms, light and solid simultaneously. She could feel the Fade around her, butterfly kisses on her skin.

Solas trailed his lips along her jaw and down her neck, setting his teeth into her like he always, always did. Not hard, but enough to make her hiss. At the same time, she felt something like a lick across her clit and she jumped. He muffled a chuckle into her neck and did it again.

“Solas!”

“Yes, vhenan?” he murmured under her ear, still nipping and kissing her while his magic wreaked havoc on her nerves below. “Is there something wrong?”

It felt like fingers now. Slow, sliding touches between each fold and dip of her center, spreading her open, holding her on the edge of a promise for completion. No matter how she writhed, she couldn't escape it.

“That's a dirty game you're playing,” she growled.

“Are you complaining?”

The licking sensation was back, spreading over her with warmth and pressure even though his hands were bracketed by her head and his lips were on her ear. She could just see him from the corner of her eye, could just barely see the wolfish gleam in them. Her only warning.

All at once the sensations his magic was spreading over her collided and she came so hard she shouted. Somehow he'd touched her on the inside with nothing more than thought, reaching every part of her that he loved to tease and torment until she was begging him to fill her. As she begged him now to do. He shifted them around, pulling her on top of him. She sank onto his erection with a sigh, but she could still feel the magic on her skin, spreading out from where they were joined until it covered her hips, her belly. It was creeping up her torso towards her breasts.

And he, the self satisfied *elf*, was laying back with his hands behind his head, watching her unravel as he both touched her and did not.

She rocked on him, setting off sparks inside herself and evidently in him. He bucked into her, seating her more fully on his cock. She leaned back to change the angle, her hands braced on his thighs. He slowly withdrew one hand from behind his head and waved two fingers. He was smirking. And she couldn't move.

“What did you do?”

“I did nothing.”

“Liar.”

“Malicious compliance, ma vhenan.”

She could feel his touch on her breasts, his hands braced on her hips, his thumb pressed against her

clit. And yet, she could also see his hands tucked behind his head. She wanted to ride him, to rise and fall and drive them both over the edge into blinding oblivion. But she couldn't move, could only take the gentle sensation of his touch all over her, his pulse inside her.

“So the Fade tied me up?” He chuckled, and the contraction of his abdominal muscles pushed him deeper into her body. She whimpered and whined. She wanted more. “Solas...please...”

“Shall I release you, vhenan?”

“Please...”

The fingers of his magic tightened all over her body, making her gasp. If anything, he grew harder inside her, curving up so that he was hitting her G-spot. The sound she made was harsh and loud. It got lost in the trees and the flowers and trickle of running water he'd brought to their room. The sensation built fast, faster than she thought it could, until she jerked in his thrall, dropping into climax like going over a cliff.

He let go of the magic then, his hands clamping onto her back to bring her down to him. He sucked her nipples into his mouth one at a time, drawing deeper moans from her as he pumped into her with abandon. She was nearly mindless from the bliss of having him everywhere, of being entirely wrapped up in him. He ground her into his body, rolling them over again so he could pin her down. He filled her so deeply she couldn't breathe and she felt him spasm inside her. He groaned into her skin.

He rested there for a moment, letting her come down from the high and relaxing his grip on her. Her body *sang*, there was no other word for it. “God, I love you.”

“Shall I show you again, vhenan? How much I love you?”

She wrapped her arms around him, feeling a new wash of light magic on her skin, soothing this time. Cooling. She giggled again. They had all the time in the world. Quite literally.

“Yes, please.”



~Fin~

Chapter End Notes

Wild screaming ensues. Thank you, dear readers, each and every one of you. This story was equal parts escapism and labor of love and I am so eternally grateful you all came along for the ride. Heaps and bundles of love and kudos to you all for your readership, your comments and your passion for this fic that somehow became the most popular thing I've ever written.

This concludes the main portion of their story, but it's not all I have to tell. There will be a sequel, tying up the last bits of plot as well as furthering the love between Carly and Solas into new areas.

Dareth shiral, lethallen.

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